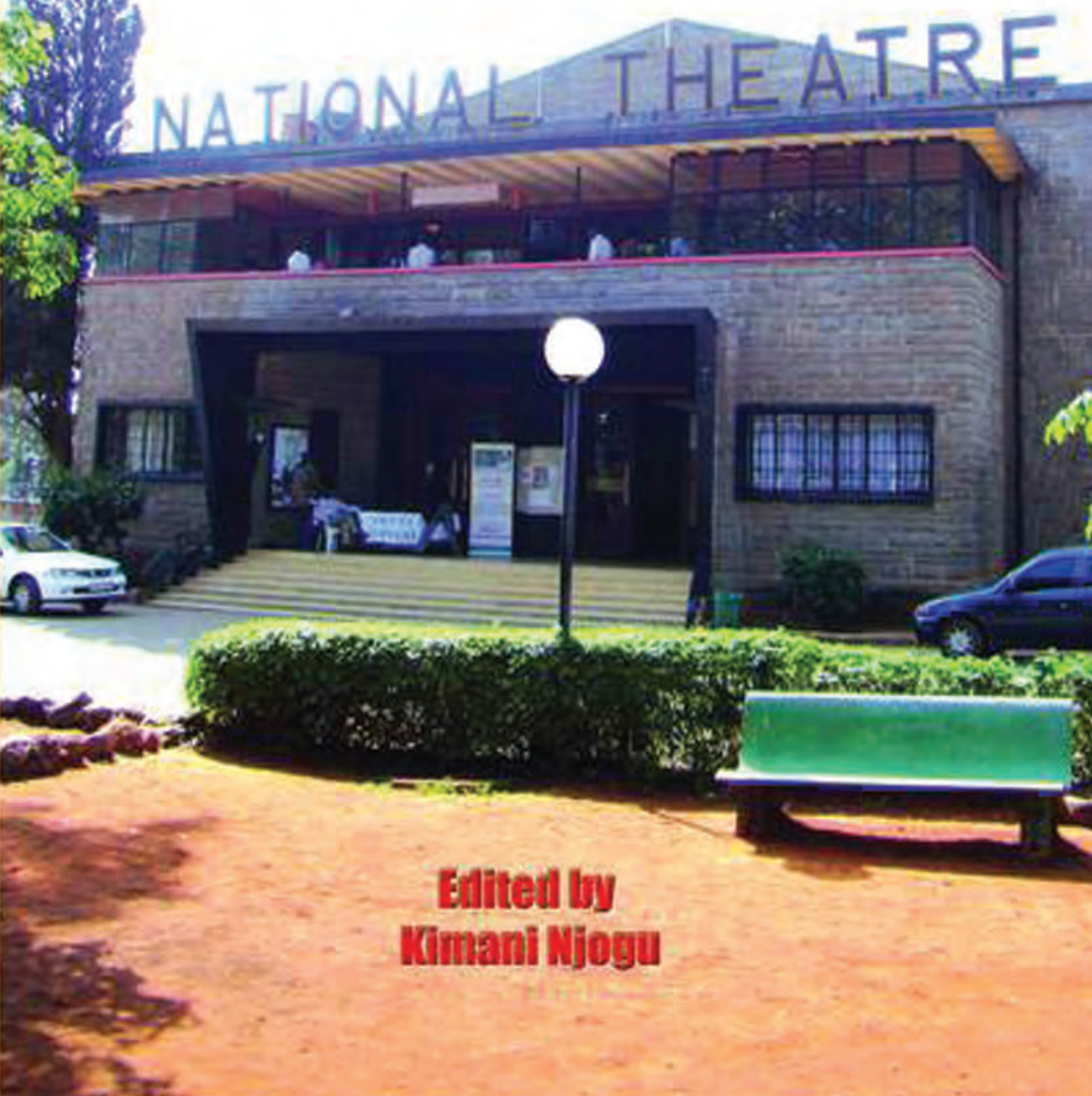


**Art, Culture & Society
VOL 3**

Getting Heard

(Re)claiming Performance Space in Kenya



**Edited by
Kimani Njogu**

VISIT...

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Getting Heard

(Re)claiming Performance Space in Kenya

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Kimani Njogu



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Ngugi wa Mirii who was taken away by a road accident on Saturday, 3rd May 2008 in Harare, Zimbabwe. Ngugi was central to the establishment of the Kamiriithu Cultural and Educational Centre and the development of performance spaces in Zimbabwe.

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This book is the result of ongoing work on media, art and culture at Twaweza Communications with funding from the Ford Foundation, Office of Eastern Africa. The project involves important discussions between academia and practitioners in media, art and culture in order to have a clearer understanding of what is being done in the region and its intrinsic and instrumental value. In addition to a journal, *Jahazi* on art, culture and performance, and facilitating regular workshops on the subject, Twaweza Communications is publishing a series of books on art, culture and society.

Volume 1 is on **Cultural Production and Social Change** and carries essays on music, youth, media, art, space and leadership.

Volume 2 is on **Culture, Performance and Identity** and has essays on gender, disability, music, media, sports, literature, religion, language and youth.

In this Volume we focus on **Performance Space**, examined from a range of angles. The aim of the Series is to capture thinking and practice as experienced in the arts and to initiate debate on the subject. In the final analysis, it is anticipated that the dialogue between practitioners and academicians will lead to greater centralization of the arts and culture in the public and private spheres. It is also hoped that the role of art, media and culture in social and political change will be appreciated and supported. It is our view that any nation that ignores the arts and culture of its people does so at its peril. Equally, any nation that does not develop its youth deliberately to take up leadership is doomed to fail.

The Volume asks key questions that have local, national and regional implications. At the centre is the role of culture in the development of national consciousness, governance and human rights. The essays seem to point to the fact that the capabilities of people can be increased through deliberate creation of spaces for creativity and self-expression. It is a call to shift paradigms in African institutions of higher learning and in the

public eye towards innovative and creative ways of knowledge generation and social transformation. The essays are also about popular culture as a site of struggle; a place for the negotiation of ethnicity, gender, nation and other identities and for the engagement of power. As is a locus of public debate and of individual and community agency, popular culture can be an important arena for social change. In the consumption of popular culture we engage power and create and express identity - a process of formation and change.

We are grateful to the Ford Foundation for supporting our work and making it possible for us to convene the dialogue sessions and the publication. Dr. Tade Aina, the Regional Representative and Dr. Joyce Nyairo, Program Officer in charge of media, arts and culture have always provided much valued guidance and support. The team at Twaweza Communications deserves gratitude for organizing the Seminars in which ideas in this Volume were shared. Catherine Bosire designed this publication and I am grateful to her.

Kimani Njogu
Nairobi.

CHAPTER ONE

***Njia Panda*:¹ Kenyan Theatre in Search of Identity**

Mshaii S. Mwangola

Nestled in a corner of the capital city Nairobi is an area whose relatively small size belies its importance as a significant historical site performing the evolving discourse on Kenyan identity. Separated from the heart of downtown Nairobi by the busy University Way which marks its southern boundary, what I will refer to here as the official cultural hub of Kenya extends on both sides of Harry Thuku Road, proceeding northwards towards Museum Hill where the national headquarters of the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) is situated.

Harry Thuku Road begins, at its junction with University Way and Moi Avenue, with a row of building marking the eastern edge of the University of Nairobi (UoN), which faces the Central Police Station.² The road proceeds beyond the university to its oldest institution, the Norfolk Hotel, which is separated from the police station by the buildings hosting the university's Faculty of Engineering. That spills across the road from the rest of the campus, and its entrance faces the official entrance to the university. The Kenya Cultural Centre (KCC) and Kenya National Theatre (KNT) complex on the road's western side is the northern neighbour of the university and lies next to the headquarters of the national broadcaster, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). Opposite the entrance to the latter is Kijabe Street which historically has served as Nairobi's "Publisher's Row," even though it no longer accommodates the majority of Kenyan publishers. Further along, Harry Thuku Road comes to an official end at the gateway to yet another hotel, the Hotel Boulevard, although a pedestrian path allows passage to Uhuru Highway and the Museum Hill.

This chapter explores this site as performing the tensions and conflicts inherent in performance space central in the making of a Kenyan identity. Its symbolic value is embedded in the collective memories and official histories of different interest groups associated with it, all of which combine to make it a stage performing the intense power struggles over what is the

nation should prioritise as performing itself as a post-colonial African nation. I present here a narrative that uses the first two decades of the histories and interaction of two important national institutions to compare and contrast alternative directions pursued in the search for a Kenyan identity. One became synonymous with the mission to continue the decolonisation project in African countries beyond the legal gains of “flag independence”, taking seriously the challenge to extend the political gains of the 1963 to the cultural realm. The other continued for several years to prioritise the cultural legacy of British imperialism, continuing the project of psychological colonisation even after the instruments of state were handed over to an independent Kenyan government. Theatre provides a lens to examine the contrasting histories of the UoN’s Department of Literature and the KNT.

A Cultural Hub

The Harry Thuku Road cultural hub dates back to the beginnings of Nairobi as a settled city, when the Norfolk Hotel was built in 1904 on land owned by Lord Delamere, the wealthiest and most politically influential of the Kenyan white settler community.³ The socio-political capital of settler Nairobi throughout the colonial era, it became the headquarters of efforts to turn the Kenya colony into an independent “White Man’s country” in the model of South Africa and Rhodesia.⁴ For decades, its only neighbour was the police station strategically situated at the end of the road leading to the rest of the city. Apart from those who came into the area for service purposes, the area was designated as a “Whites only” zone for most of the colonial era. It served as the first port of call for newcomers and visitors to the Kenya colony, its guest list including names such as US President Theodore Roosevelt who famously got stuck in the marshy swamp in front of the hotel in 1909, writer Ernest Hemingway and several members of the British aristocracy. It became known as “home away from home” for the out-of-town white settler population whenever they came to the city.

This was the site of what has become known as the first public performance within the colonial territory of Kenya of the national struggle for independence. In March 1922, a crowd of several thousand African demonstrators gathered outside the police station to demand the release of the charismatic Harry Thuku, leader of the East African Association (EAA). This was significant because it was the first time that the colonial

state had been faced with a public demonstration bringing together Africans from different ethnicities uniting to protest a single issue that suggested a national, rather than ethnic or localized agenda.

Harry Thuku had become particularly important in a burgeoning movement among young Africans living in Nairobi who had become convinced of the need to develop alliances across ethnic and even racial lines. Thuku had broken away from the Kikuyu Association, which was led by chiefs from his own community to form the Young Kikuyu Association, which later became the EAA. He used this platform to reach out to Africans from other ethnic communities and to form alliances with some members of the Asian community, who were then beginning to challenge the domination of the European settlers.

On March 14th 1922, he was arrested and taken into custody to the police station. By the morning of 16th March, a large crowd of thousands had gathered at this site, demanding Thuku's release. As the tension mounted, the police panicked, firing into the crowd of unarmed demonstrators. Several of the peaceful demonstrators were killed when they were caught in the crossfire between police and settler fire, the latter coming from the Norfolk Hotel.⁵ Among them was Mary Nyanjiru Muthoni, whose passionate counter-challenge to police attempts to disperse the demonstrators had strengthened the resolve of the crowd to not only have justice done, in the form of Thuku's release, but also to become the agents to ensuring that was accomplished.

Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, who was present that day famously remarked later "the tree of liberty must be watered with blood." The blood that marked the ground that fateful day in 1922 baptized it as the symbolic battleground for the fight for *uhuru*. Dormant for the three decades during the zenith of the colonial era, at which time it remained associated with the colonial state and settler elite, this space re-emerged into the public consciousness just months before the declaration of the State of Emergency that would hasten the end of the colonial era in Kenya.

In 1950, a new multi-faceted, inter-racial institution, the Kenya Cultural Council (KCC) was established to provide a theatrical and literary home for Kenyans. Plans for an inter-racial cultural centre, "a home suitable for Music, Drama, Dancing and the Allied Arts", had been in the pipeline since 1946 (Maule 5). Existing cultural buildings were not considered

sufficient to play that role.⁶ The building of the KNT, as the first institution under the auspices of the KCC, was then mandated by Arthur Creech-Jones the British Secretary of State, and carried out under the auspices of the British Council.

The vision of setting up the KNT brought together European and Asian partners who agreed to pool their resources in creating a single “national” entity. In 1951, the Governing Council and a Board of Management was set up to oversee the resulting Kenya Cultural Centre Ordinance. Despite the emphasis on performing an inter-racial Kenyan identity, there was no substantial African input in the evolution of this institution. Neither the Council nor the Board had any African members. In fact, Africans, the majority in the country, were excluded not only explicitly in the planning and setting up of the institution, but also effectively through its location. Richard Frost, the British Council officer who oversaw the project, reported that:

The National Theatre was built where it was built because those who planned the scheme, including Thornly Dyer, the architect who designed the Parliament Building and conceived of the Master plan for Nairobi, wanted to build the National Theatre in the “snob area” of Nairobi. The instruction given by the Secretary of State . . . was to build a National Theatre where people of culture and position could meet. At the time no Africans were able to live anywhere near the site which was selected, but that site was chosen because it was hoped in due time the residential apartheid would be brought to an end and Muthaiga, Westlands, the Hill and other areas, which were then only open to Europeans, would become districts where leading people of all races would live. As it was not to be a working class theatre, it was built in the middle of well-to-do Nairobi. It was hoped that the Centre would be the headquarters of drama and music and that from there the arts would be taken out to other districts. “People’s theatres” could be established elsewhere, but the National Theatre and Cultural Centre were to be at the centre of Nairobi (73).

On November 6th 1952, less than a month after a State of Emergency was imposed on the colony, the KNT opened on a site opposite the Norfolk Hotel. Africans were conspicuous by their absence in the list of VIPs that attended the opening by Sir Ralph Richardson. And so it was, that this so-called national theatre—the first to be built anywhere in the British colonial empire, was deliberately situated in an area closed to the majority

population on both race and class grounds, performing the prevailing colonial understanding of “culture” as the preserve of the elite. The Centre was destined to serve “well-to-do Nairobi” and its association with the “snob area” and “leading people of all races” would continue until well after independence, isolating KNT from the very people it was supposed to serve.⁷ In fact, community halls were later set up in other parts of the city to serve as cultural bases for the African majority who were generally excluded from the events taking place the KNT.

The State of Emergency paralyzed life in the African parts of the city, leaving this area relatively undisturbed. Apart from the proximity of the police station, there was increased security from the state, ensuring the safety of the KNT and its neighbours. Theatre became an important psychological weapon during the Emergency period. Many of the plays staged at this time at the KNT were for the express benefit of the British army, serving as well to boost the morale of the European settler community.

Meanwhile, even as the KNT was nearing completion, the foundation stone marking the location of a new institution, the Royal Technical College of East Africa (RTCEA), was laid on the undeveloped land between the police station and the Norfolk Hotel in April 1952. The decision to begin the RTCEA was taken by settlers in defiance to the Colonial Government’s vision of a single regional higher education institution, already in development at Makerere in Uganda.⁸ The colonial state had made clear its intentions of developing its two East African colonies (Kenya and Uganda) and the protectorate of Tanganyika as a single territory; the Kenyan settler community conceptualized the emergence of Kenya as an independent settler nation, such as South Africa or Rhodesia, and resisted regional cooperation that would impede those plans. The decision to inaugurate a new institution of higher education in Nairobi was taken in 1947 as an emphatic rejection of British government plans to channel all its resources towards one regional college.

In 1954, as the college was still under construction, the Asian community agreed to add to it the college for Arts, Science and Commerce it was planning to build in Nairobi. Hence, another institution, with the participation of both the European and Asian settler community but without that of the African majority was planned and established on what

then became known as College Road. The campus of the Gandhi Memorial Academy extended the RTCEA to the marshlands in front of the existing site, becoming the immediate neighbour of KNT. The college opened its doors in 1956. In 1961, it became the Royal College, Nairobi—the second University College in East Africa.

As Kenya attained its independence in 1963, these two neighbouring institutions would become prominent players in the struggle to develop a Kenyan identity that truly reflected the make-up, character and priorities of an African post-colonial nation. If the KNT and UoN had both been birthed by a determination to extend Western discourses of culture and knowledge in the African space known as Kenya, the directions that the two institutions took demonstrate the radically different agendas of those inheriting the responsibility and ability to influence the direction of Kenyan identity after independence.

Not Yet Uhuru

In the immediate decade following the attainment of independence, KNT remained resistant to change and continued to largely promote the hegemony of the status quo, affirming British culture as the hallmark of civilisation. Forced to make concessions to the political changes that transferred ownership of the theatre to the Kenyan government, the theatre's management appointed Mark Mshila to the position of assistant director in 1968. Mshila, the first African at this level of seniority in KNT administration, was however not given the opportunity to make any fundamental changes. His assigned responsibilities were located away from the KNT itself, being primarily outreach to amateur African companies working in the community centres located elsewhere in the city. Later that year, Seth Adagala, the first African director of the KNT was appointed. With a mandate to make the KNT the true centre of theatrical activities all round the nation, Adagala initiated some important projects, notably the establishment of National Theatre Drama School, whose first graduates formed the core of a resident company in 1970. The company's performances in Nairobi were complemented by national tours of their most popular productions, which tended to be simple comedies.

Laudable as they were, Mshila's and Adagala's appointments and achievements did not translate to a decolonisation of the theatre. British

citizens and the European theatre companies remained in control and the most prominent patrons of the KCC, and the KNT continued to promote an elitist agenda. Its drama school's curriculum, for example, was heavily Eurocentric, making what a 1969 KCC report called a "practical" decision to ignore African aesthetics in favour of "the known disciplines" of the theatre. These—stage movement, stage management, acting, script-writing, directing and play writing—favoured Western theatre traditions in orientation (Chesaina and Mwangi 219). While the school did ultimately contribute to the development of Kenyan theatre, through the work and influence of its graduates in the following decades,⁹ Western theatre continued in general to be promoted in form and content over the development or support of any other.¹⁰

Similarly, the KCC's governing council's assessment of the successes of the company was limited; its 1973-4 report contentiously observed "little progress ... in furthering African theatre appreciation among the public" (Obura 164).

Decolonising the Mind

Meanwhile, soon after Kenya attained its independence, the RCN, now offering bachelor degrees from the University of London, changed its name to the University College, Nairobi (UCN). In 1966, together with the colleges in Makerere, Uganda and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, it began to offer degree courses in the name of the University of East Africa (UEA). In 1970, the latter was dissolved to make way for national universities for each of the three countries, and the University of Nairobi (UoN) came into being.

It was in the building closest to the KNT, a memorial to Mahatma Gandhi, a champion against imperialism, that in the last quarter of 1968, the debate that would become synonymous with the Kenyan campaign to "decolonize the mind" in the academy was launched. Gandhi Wing hosted, among other departments, the college's Department of English. Under the chairmanship of James Stewart, it began to discuss re-structuring the curriculum, which had hitherto focused on the literature of the English people. Stewart presented proposals to the Arts Faculty Board outlining the future direction of the department, suggesting that it widen its focus

to include all literature produced in the English language and tradition, with an increase of literature from the African continent.¹¹

In response, three African members of the faculty, Owuor Anyumba, Taban lo Liyong' and James Ngugi¹² issued the now famous document "questioning [Stewart's] assumption that the English tradition and the emergence of the modern west were the central root of Kenya's consciousness and cultural heritage" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising* 89). "On The Abolition of the English Department" argued instead for a radical re-structuring that went far beyond the chair's modest suggestions. Stewart had mentioned the "remote possibility" that a separate department of African Literature or alternatively of African Literature and Culture might someday be feasible, recommending that in the meantime a separate department of Languages and Linguistics be established to complement the English department. The latter would pay attention being given to French and African languages. The three scholars proposed in response that the English Department be immediately replaced with a Department of African Literature and Languages with indigenous oral literature, as the linchpin of the curriculum. Kenya, East Africa, the African continent and its diasporas would be centred in place of England, the British isles, the European continent and its diasporas. With regard to choosing which global literature ought to be studied in the department, they recommended that particular attention be paid to the critical question of relevance to the Kenyan experience.

The counter-proposal set off a raging debate that went far beyond the department and the UoN's Arts Faculty Board. The following year, when English Language and Literature departments of the different colleges of the universities of East and Central Africa met in Nairobi, the issue of the direction they should take with regard to decolonizing the African academy was not yet resolved and the conference was dominated by the issues set out in this document.¹³ The UCN English Department became the Department of Literature in 1971, a few months after the UoN came into being as an autonomous institution. In principle, the radicals won the day, although the resulting changes in syllabi were not fully actualized for several years. It was 1973 before a largely African faculty was able to fully implement the re-structuring of the curriculum to reflect the new perspectives.

In 1974, the discussion spread even further. Invited participants from a wide range of institutions, including scholars and educators from other countries, gathered at a Nairobi school to discuss “The Teaching of African Literature in Kenyan Schools.” The debate spilled over into the public sphere—the media documenting the immense interest accompanying the process. What began as a debate on the teaching of literature became a national conversation on the relationship between socio-cultural institutions and policy, and the resulting implications for socio-cultural institutions invested in contributing to the development of a truly national identity.

Thus, the first half of the decade of the seventies saw Kenyan intellectuals on what had become Harry Thuku Road facing the challenge to “decolonise the mind”. It was by no means an easy task—African artists at the KNT were still struggling to do away with the colonial character of that institution, even though their counterparts at the UoN Department of Literature were more successful in laying the foundation for a new intellectual agenda in the Kenyan academy.¹⁴ Still, even in the latter institution, the changes were frustratingly slow in coming although it became clear by the middle of that decade that the radicals at the UoN had been successful in beginning to at least influence the university—and the nation—towards embracing and performing its identity as a post-colonial African entity. The contrasting nature of the two institutions was brought sharply into relief in 1976, through a dramatic confrontation that reiterated the competing agendas of the Harry Thuku cultural hub.

Face to face

Why was Kenyan literature on the whole so submissive and hardly depicted the people, the masses, as capable of making and changing history? Take the heroes and heroines of our history: Kimathi, Koitalel, Me Katilili, Mary Nyanjiru, Waiyaki. Why were our imaginative artists not singing songs of praises to these and their epic deeds of resistance? Whose history and whose deeds were the historians and creative writers recording for our children to read? (Ngugi and Mugo [vi]).

In 1976, two faculty members of the department, Micere Githae Mugo and Ngugi wa Thiong’o, frustrated at what they perceived as the deafening silence in the public sphere on important questions dealing with the

linkages between Kenyan history, national identity and the production of knowledge in Kenya, embarked on an attempt to redress the status quo. Lamenting the fact that “[t]here was no single historical work written by a Kenyan telling of the grandeur of the heroic resistance of Kenyan people fighting foreign forces of exploitation and domination, a resistance movement whose history goes back to the 15th and 16th centuries”, Mugo and Ngugi set out to write a play on Dedan Kimathi, one of “these neglected heroes and heroines of the Kenyan masses” (vi). Not satisfied with merely writing the script, they then insisted that the play be mounted at the KNT.

A brilliant general of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army (KLFA), Dedan Kimathi wa Waciuri is the best known of the leaders of the forces that took to the forests of the so-called “White Highlands” in the fifties, raging a devastating guerrilla war against the British army and supporters of the colonial government. His capture and subsequent execution marked the end of a conflict after several years. Although the KLFA lost the war, the insurrection marked the end of British colonial rule in Kenya, and put paid to settler dreams of turning the colony into a minority-rule racially segregated “settler nation”. To the colonial state, the European settler establishment and their sympathisers, Kimathi had been unquestionably a terrorist of the worst kind, who deserved the common criminal’s death he was subjected to at Kamiti Maximum Prison. It was, after all, to fight Kimathi and his colleagues, that the British Army, whose entertainment needs the KNT had sought so valiantly to meet only two decades earlier, had mounted one of its most extensive colonial campaigns. To most Kenyans however, he was a heroic martyr who sacrificed his life in the struggle for independence.¹⁵ Few details about Kimathi’s life, vision or struggle were however available to most people, who were thus left with few resources to authoritatively challenge the colonial state’s articulation of Kimathi’s place in Kenyan history.

Mugo and Ngugi’s play, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (Trial), performed the new phase of the national project of psychological decolonisation manifesting itself most overtly in the epistemological revolution of the Kenyan academy. As efforts to “Kenyanise” the different levels of the Kenyan education system got under way, it had become clear to them as to many others of their colleagues that there was need to extend the principles and goals of the intellectual decolonisation project to the national

cultural institutions neighbouring the UoN. After all, these possessed the potential to reach a wider public than those affiliated with the education system. As might be deduced from their statement above, the physical boundaries separating the different institutions in the Harry Thuku Road cultural hub symbolised more than the mere demarcation of geographical space. Although Kimathi was the iconic figure of the nation's liberation struggle, the official custodian of the nation's history, the institutions charged with the recovery, celebration and preservation of the nation's history and culture such as the NMK had next to nothing on display in recognition of the epic role he (or any of his colleagues) had played. Mugo and Ngugi's *Trial* was therefore read as a challenge to institutions like the NMK and KNT, a reminder that the story of Kenya extended beyond the official archives that the British had handed over.

If *Trial* was an intervention into the nature of decolonisation as a process of psychological liberation that continued well after the attainment of "flag independence", it also provided an opportunity to think more critically about socio-cultural institutions as viable forums for engendering public cerebration of national issues.

The immediate provocation for the play was provided by the outpouring of outrage that followed an earlier play also on Dedan Kimathi. Written by a Kenyan playwright, Kenneth Watene, it was angrily dismissed by African critics who accused the playwright of "blindly reproducing within the independent present the image of the black man produced by distortions made by the white man in the colonial past" (Wanjala 133). In their own creative response, Mugo and Ngugi re-cast Kimathi's story to illustrate their understanding of good theatre as that which is on the side of the people, and without masking mistakes and weaknesses gives courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation. They saw theatre as the ideal space to challenge the continuing influence of the cultural imperialism apparent in national cultural institutions such as the NMK, the KBC and the KNT. Ngugi in fact argued that it was "in the theatre that [the domination] by foreign cultural interests [was] most nakedly clear" and "in the theatre where the struggle for national expression in culture [was] most manifest" (*Detained* 43, 45). As he pointed out,

the Kenya government owned premises, the KCC and the KNT [were at the time] controlled by foreigners offering foreign theatre to Kenyans. A foreign imperialist cultural mission, the British Council occupie[d] virtually all the offices at the KCC. The governing council of the same Centre [was] chaired by a British national, and the British Council [was] in addition represented on the council. The KNT...run by the governing council [was] completely dominated by foreign-based theatre groups... Most of these groups at the KNT often import[ed] directors, costumes, orchestral pieces and actors from England and Canada, giving the impression that there are no Kenyan directors, no Kenyan costumes, no Kenyan actors and no Kenyan musical instruments (Ngugi *Detained* 44).

Trial's premiere was surrounded by drama as compelling as its plotline. One of the two plays chosen to represent the nation at FESTAC '77, it was billed to make its national debut on the KNT stage in October 1976. A graduate of the department of Literature, Francis Imbuga penned the other play, *Betrayal in the City* (Betrayal), which had won the competition mounted to select the country's entry to the festival. The organisers of the Kenyan FESTAC'77 team deemed it appropriate to send both plays to the festival, unconsciously performing through their decision what would later be clear as the two first eras of Kenyan theatre. While *Trial*, the representative of the first era, focused its attention on the past, *Betrayal*, which would become recognised later as the seminal production of the second era, addressed the post-colonial present.¹⁶ Together the two plays performed an understanding of Kenyan theatre as a platform for a national conversation on its identity as an African nation facing the challenges of crafting its future.

The timing of the twin-première was also carefully selected. The organisers of the FESTAC '77 team had planned to stage the two shows during this time for two strategic reasons. First, October commemorated the bloody struggle for independence that *Trial* celebrated; 20th October was in fact a national holiday honouring the heroes of colonial era. *Betrayal* on the other hand addressed the subsequent "post-colonial" era, questioned who it was that should be considered heroes and what the challenges they faced within it. It seemed then particularly apt to present these plays during this particular month, even though they were not scheduled to go to Nigeria until the next year. Also of significance was the fact that the General Assembly of UNESCO was meeting in Kenya at the time; the FESTAC '77 team felt it was important that the KNT present to

the world theatre that was truly Kenyan in its form and concerns, and not some foreign import. The question of identity—what theatre enabled Kenyans to celebrate themselves as well as what Kenyans presented as a performance of the nation—was at the heart of subsequent events.

The FESTAC '77 team found itself fighting management of the KNT for the right to perform the two plays on the national theatre stage. The latter refused to accommodate the two plays in the calendar, first contending that the theatre was already booked out, with this additional intelligence being offered: "African plays never attracted true theatre-lovers anyway."¹⁷ Despite the anger that this statement produced, there was little surprise for those familiar with the theatre's history. There was already bad blood by this time between the KNT and the department of Literature, so it did not help that artists associated with the UoN were at the forefront of the FESTAC '77 team. One of the first acts of the faculty, once the "abolition" of the English department had resulted in the establishment of the department of Literature, had been to issue a statement denouncing the KCC, the parent body of the KNT, as "a service station for foreign masters" (Ngugi *Decolonising* 40). Secondly, the head of the FESTAC '77 delegation was Seth Adagala, the first African director of the KNT who had served a difficult tenure from 1968 until his controversial replacement just over a year earlier by James Falkland, a leading figure of the European theatre establishment, who had arrived in Kenya as an actor for the privately owned Donovan Maule Theatre at the beginning of the decade. For Falkland and his colleagues, it was important that the KNT perform itself as able to compete with any global (read Western) stage in terms of its offerings.

As it turned out however, following the intervention of the Ministry of Social Services, the FESTAC '77 programme was added to the calendar. *Trial* and *Betrayal* were finally staged for a total of only eight nights between 20th and 30th October. Sell-out crowds for both FESTAC shows made nonsense of the KNT's management's gloomy prediction of empty houses.

On 20th October, the opening night of *Trial* and the silver anniversary of the beginning of the 1952 State of Emergency now commemorated as Kenyatta Day, a significant performance occurred, not only in the theatre itself, but also on Harry Thuku Road. The shows not only sold out, but, as Micere Githae Mugo later recalled, the audiences overflowed onto "the

steps, along the aisle, wherever they could find space ... They sat to the end, then they flooded the front of the theatre singing and dancing pieces of the play" (Wilkinson 113). At the end of the play, the cast and audience surged out of the KNT theatre, singing and dancing in celebration of the powerful performance they had shared of the Kimathi story. They made their way out onto Harry Thuku Road. As they approached the entrance of the Norfolk Hotel, a contingent of police turned them back. They peacefully returned to the grounds of the KNT where the collective celebration of nationalist heroes such as Mary Nyanjiru Muthoni went on for awhile. "[I]t was as if the cast and the audience were trying to create an open space which would allow them to communicate better with the spirits of those who had died [at this site] in 1922" (Ngugi *Penpoints* 51). The daily celebrations continued for the rest of the run, although they remained confined to the KNT grounds.

An uneasy truce marked the relationship between the KNT and those at the UoN following the acrimony of the FESTAC '77 run, although there were still plenty of "incidents" at the theatre. On one occasion, there were even complaints to the police by the leaders of the European amateur companies who accused the radicals, including leaders of the FESTAC group, of planning / carrying out sabotage of their activities. By the end of the decade, the original vision of KNT as the centre of a truly Kenyan theatre was clearly a mirage; as Joy Mboya noted in hindsight, "from the mid-seventies there was a steady decline of the KNT [as] a potential anchor of artistic creativity in Kenya" (169).

In the meantime, the Department of Literature increasingly established itself as a leading player in the development of Kenyan theatre. Under the direction of John Ruganda, the Free Travelling Theatre (FTT), "an interdisciplinary outfit of students and staff", was launched in 1974. FTT followed the model of national university travelling theatres all over the continent, criss-crossing the country, its mission, according to one programme, "taking theatre to the spaces it rightfully belongs... the people's theatres [where] we shall all perform together" (Chesaina and Mwangi 221). Students and faculty also played an increasingly important role in the annual Kenya National Schools and Colleges Drama Festival (KNSCDF), a grassroots theatre programme based in Kenyan educational institutions.¹⁸

The KNSCDF had been associated with the KNT since its launch in 1959. Even after the preliminary levels of the festival spread out to other parts of the country, the climax, the national finals, was held in Nairobi each year. This stopped in 1982, when the festival organisers led by the first African head of the festival organising body, Wasambo Were, decided to make the festival truly national by rotating the national finals through the different provincial capitals.¹⁹ The decision to quit the KNT as the festival hub was seen as a victory for the radicals including the academics at UoN who insisted that the KNT lacked a truly national character and did not serve the majority's interest.

Perhaps the most important development in Kenyan theatre was the 1977 partnership between UoN faculty (led by Ngugi wa Mirii and Ngugi wa Thiong'o) and the Kamiriithu community which produced the most famous theatrical piece in Kenyan history, *Ngaahika Ndeenda* (I'll Marry When I Want).²⁰ A Friern literacy process initiated by members of the village illuminated the potential of orature as an aesthetic process of meaning making, in which all participants, regardless of their level of formal education had something life-changing to learn. The initial script was written by the two scholars, and augmented by the rest of the community. Cast, crew and observers contributed additional material, most of it drawn from forms and examples of Gikuyu orature. The directorial skills of Kimani Gecau, another member of faculty at the department of Literature, often deferred to the views of those who saw an alternative way of embodying the script or of conducting rehearsals. It is instructive therefore, given the initial vision of the KNT as the national institution that would be seminal in the creation and shaping of Kenyan theatre, that it is the partnership between the Kamiriithu community and the UoN scholars which has since become the best known example of Kenyan theatre all over the world.

The theatre companies that patronised the KNT most heavily, those that relied on the European theatre establishment that Ngugi had so bitterly complained about, were also facing growing constraints during this period. The government instituted increasing control over foreign exchange reserves affecting payments to the expatriate cast and crew that these companies relied on. Further bureaucratic measures implemented both in Britain, the primary source of such labour, and in Kenya, requiring complicated procedures for work permits and higher remuneration than

was possible to provide at a time when the Kenyan economy in decline with the imposition of a strict Structural Adjustment Policy regime, sounded a death-knell to the practice of relying on foreign artists.²¹ While a handful of the companies soldiered on, and foreign productions continued to feature at the KNT, it became increasingly clear that Kenyan theatre would have to rely on local talent for its development. The question as to what material would be dominant on Kenyan stages remained open.

All this contributed to the competing discourses between the two institutions, which climaxed in 1982, the thirtieth anniversary year of the KNT and a year that proved difficult for the nation, Kenyan academics, and those working in theatre in particular.²² Two plays by university dons, originally scheduled for performance at the KNT were abruptly dropped from the calendar. First was the January production of Joe de Graft's *Muntu* by the university's Faculty of Education based at Kenyatta University College (KUC). *Muntu* is a re-presentation of African history, beginning from the mythic times of beginnings to the troubled period of coup d'états that succeeded the era of euphoria in many independent African countries. Originally commissioned by the All Africa Council of Churches, the play drew liberally in terms of content and form from the orature of the African continent. The decision to halt the production of *Muntu* was particularly surprising given that it was, at that very same time, on the national "O" level Literature syllabus.

Barely a month later, days to the premier of a new KCECC production, this time Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's second work, *Maitu Njugira* (Mother Sing for Me), the cast and crew for rehearsal arrived at its projected venue, the KNT, to find the auditorium locked, with no word from its management. It is interesting in hindsight that this production was not premiered at Kamiirithu itself, but rather was slated to do so at the KNT. *Maitu Njugira* was thus a challenge to the KNT authorities; here was an African language "community theatre" production claiming its right to première at the national cultural headquarters. After unsuccessful attempts to gain access to the theatre or obtain explanation from the management, the company moved the production next door to "Education Theatre II (ED.II)," the lecture theatre that served as the Department of Literature's performance auditorium. Hundreds squeezed in every night to watch the "open rehearsals" of the show before these were stopped by

the government.¹ The state offered little reason for its actions, save that the productions threatened to disrupt public peace. Once again, regardless of whether or not its management actually connived with the state to stop the production, the KNT was tainted in the public mind with accusations of participation in the censorship of “the people’s theatre”, while the UoN became associated with the defence of people’s right to a truly national theatre.

This production of *Maitu Njugira* at the UoN marked the end of one era of theatrical performance in Kenya and ushered in another. The Kenyan government then cracked down on theatrical performance and the embodied performance of literature throughout the country beginning with the razing to the ground of the community theatre space at Kamiriithu. The KCECC initiatives were labelled as “anti-development”, and replaced by a government institution which pointedly ignored all the path-breaking literacy and other work that the community efforts had achieved. In fact, while KCECC would go on to be a model for community theatre / Theatre for Development practitioners world-wide, its most immediate legacy in Kenya was an unprecedented crackdown of theatre, with the government developing a particular suspicion of community theatre initiatives. The potential of a growing artistic partnership between the academy and communities modelled on this initiative was quietly shelved as it was brought to an abrupt and painful end.

At the UoN, the impact was especially felt; Micere Mugo, dean of the Faculty of Arts, faculty members Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ngugi wa Mirii, as well as chair of department Kimani Gecau, were all forced to flee the country into exile.² The department’s annual theatrical festival was called off. Finally, following the attempted coup d’état by junior military officers in August that year, the university was closed down for over a year. Ostensibly, this was caused by the support that some of the student leaders publicly offered to the coup plotters before the government regained control. The state took advantage of the closure to attempt a “purge” of radical elements among both the student body and faculty.

By the time it re-opened after over a year, it seemed as if the radical theatrical agenda emanating from the UoN had been stopped in its tracks. However, unobtrusively, a new era of Kenyan theatre, what John Ruganda would name “trickster theatre,” began to take hold. It would take another

decade before the theatre stage at the UoN would regain its vibrancy. That period however falls outside the parameters of this discussion.

Conclusion

The contrasting histories of the first two decades of the UoN and the KNT provide an opportunity to re-visit the cultural hub around Harry Thuku Road as a performance space enabling a celebration of the possibilities of integrating national institutions into the search for uhuru. Initially imagined as sites to continue the imperial mission in Kenya, the UoN and KNT found the changing political environment that followed the attainment of flag independence exerting internal pressure for change that gradually transformed Kenyan theatre. They thus became primary sites in the quest for a national identity, each performing one possible route to the search for the definition of the new republic of Kenya.

The KNT held on to the colonial legacy for several years, continuing to privilege Eurocentric performance traditions. Thus, it prioritised the nation's legacy as a creation of British imperialism, becoming a compelling exhibit for those who accused Kenya of becoming a neo-colony that looked to the West for its identity. In contrast, the UoN's ED II took its cue from the agenda set out by the department of Literature, where the performance traditions and socio-political concerns of Kenya, East Africa, Africa, the African Diaspora and the Global South took precedence. Theatre became a site through which these contrasting visions of what Kenyan culture ought to be were showcased to the world. The decades following these foundational years would be crucial in establishing the next era in Kenyan theatre—a guerrilla war where the creative intellectuals committed to the next phase of national independence: the attainment of cultural and economic independence advocated by decolonisation theorist-activists such as Amílcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon, would continue their battle by changing tactics and arenas of engagement.

Notes

¹ Crossroads (Kiswahili)

² The row of university buildings on the street marks the eastern corner of the University Great Court. It is here that the UoN's central administration is located.

³ Delamere's importance in the settler-colony was affirmed in the naming of the most important street in Nairobi's Central Business District after him. After independence, Delamere Avenue was re-named Kenyatta Avenue after the independent nation's founder-president.

⁴ See B. A. Ogot "The Settler Dream".

⁵ There is a discrepancy between the official records and collective memory as to what exactly happened. Eye-witness accounts, including those reported, compiled and passed on by James Beuttah (Spencer, 12) and Jomo Kenyatta (*Suffering* 32) put the number of those killed to over 200 (Sicherman 60-61), while the official inquest admitted only to the deaths of 21. The magistrate conducting the inquiry ultimately absolved the killers of blame, instead suggesting that "the unfortunate interference by the women of the crowd" was responsible for the tragedy (Governor of Kenya 17-19). This had happened when a delegation from the protesters, including EAA's Propaganda Secretary Jomo Kenyatta, had agreed to disperse the crowd to facilitate dialogue over Thuku's arrest. Muthoni had called those who began to leave cowards, daring them to remove their trousers and hand them over to the women who would not be afraid to go in to the station if necessary to get Thuku out. The inquest heard that throughout the vigil outside the station, women were instrumental in ensuring that the demonstrators did not give in to police intimidation intended to break-up the peaceful demonstration.

⁶ These included the first theatre building, the Theatre Royale, which was put up in Nairobi in 1913. The building itself still stands on what is today Kenyatta Avenue, the auditorium having been converted into a cinema hall (Cameo Cinema).

⁷ Ezekiel Mphahlele, founder of Chemchemi Cultural Centre, noted after independence that the theatre and cultural centre's location—far from the working-class areas of Nairobi frequented by most Kenyans—made it unsuitable for a national theatre (Frost 73). Mphahlele worked with the alternative community centres serving these areas, using the Mbari club model with which he had been associated in Nigeria, to create creative urban spaces.

⁸ The development of a single inter-territorial university (serving the territories of Tanganyika, Uganda and Kenya) was first mooted by the De La Warr (1937) and Asquith (1945) Commissions on Higher Education in East Africa. With the establishment of the East African Commission in 1948, this became official policy.

⁹ These include Paul Onsongo, Anne Wanjugu, Edwin Nyutho, Alex Dindi, Tirus Gathwe and Allan Konya. It is fair to say that no other institution, with the exception of the

universities and the institutions affiliated to Kenya National Schools and Colleges Drama Festival, shaped Kenyan theatre more, especially in Nairobi.

¹⁰ The KNT also hosted several productions by and for the Asian community. These fall outside this discussion as they have generally been marketed specifically to this constituency and have not really influenced the development of endogenous Kenyan theatre.

¹¹ African literature had been introduced into the department soon after independence by Es'kia (Ezekiel) Mphahlele a co-founder of Chemichemi cultural centre. However to this point, African literature was treated as a marginal area in the department's scheme.

¹² James Ngugi later dropped the name "James" officially becoming "Ngugi wa Thiong'o". I will hereafter refer to him as "Ngugi".

¹³ By this time, although professional schools faculties were still being shared between the three countries, each university college, Makerere, Dar es Salaam and Nairobi, had its own faculties of Arts and Sciences, including independent departments of English. The national institutions at Dar es Salaam and Makerere made similar changes to their programs following this intervention. Ayi Kwei Armah, who taught at the College of National Education in Chamg'ombe, Tanzania in the seventies, captures the centrality of this debate and the issues it raises in his novel *Osiris Rising* in which a similar re-organising of curriculum takes place at an African university.

¹⁴ The changes were by no means confined to Literature. I have discussed the evolution of Orature as a decolonising discourse within different disciplines in the Kenyan academy elsewhere. See "Performing Our Stories, Performing Ourselves". I have restricted myself here to the discipline of Literature and the Department of Literature as the relevant points of reference in this discussion.

¹⁵ Despite being honoured with a major street in Nairobi's central business district after independence, Kimathi's legacy remained a controversial question until recently. His statue was finally erected in 2007 by the Kenyan state at the junction of the street named after him. See a discussion of this statue and contrasting perspectives to it in the second and third issues of *Jahazi*, a Journal published by Twaweza Communications in Nairobi.

¹⁶ Francis Imbuga's play was the first play of the trickster tradition, to successfully become household names in the country through the use of literary devices from Kenyan indigenous traditions as embodied by tricksters such as the Hare, which made its biting criticism of Kenyan politics and society through expert disguise. This theatre would enable theatre to survive as a medium of socio-political discourse through the most difficult years of repression and censorship of the nation's post-colonial history. See Ruganda's *Telling the Truth Laughingly* for a discussion of Imbuga's work.

¹⁷ See Ngugi wa Thiong'o's accounts on this in the aptly titled essay "Handcuffs for a Play" in *Writers in Politics* (49-53) and in his prison memoirs *Detained* (72-80).

¹⁸ The KNSDF is actually a combination of three festivals featuring, primary school, secondary school and colleges. Thousands of young participants present literally hundreds of items in any Kenyan language, currently in four categories: plays, dramatised dance, dramatised poetry and oral narrative each year. At its inception, festival participants were drawn from elite schools and featured only English plays. The festivals work on a competitive basis, winning items in each category proceeding through the following levels: zonals, divisionals, districts, provincials and nationals. Although universities do not enter the festivals as participants, members of faculty have traditionally been deeply involved in the festival, serving as adjudicators and workshop directors for the festivals. The current festival chairman, Dr. Ezekiel Alembi, is a faculty member of Kenyatta University. Kenyan universities, especially members of the departments of Literature, have been instrumental in influencing the direction, aesthetics and quality of what was on offer even though their own students were not eligible for participation. Several students who first gained theatrical experience as student participants in the festival went on to hone their skills at the UoN (and later its sister-institutions). University graduates, particularly those from faculties of Education and / or focusing in Theatre Arts through Departments of Literature have gone on to train the next generation coming up through the school system.

¹⁹ Were is currently a member of faculty in the Department of Literature at Kenyatta University. He was also instrumental in the re-structuring of the English language and Literature curricula in the schools following the Nairobi School conference, and counts as one of his most important achievements successfully overseeing the integration of Oral Literature component in schools.

²⁰ The KCECC, started originally as a youth centre, was re-launched as a community initiative in October 1975 under the leadership of Njeeri wa Amoni a community development officer, to create opportunities for education and training for local people. Three areas of priority, adult education, cultural development and health were identified with programs being developed for each. Ngugi wa Mirii, a researcher in adult education based at the UoN's Kikuyu campus (whose work was influenced by Brazilian educator Paolo Freire's theories on pedagogy for the oppressed) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, then chair of the department of Literature, co-wrote the script as respective heads of the education and cultural development committees. Other faculty of the department of Literature who also worked with the KCECC were Kimani Gecau (who directed both *Ngaahika Ndeenda* and the second piece *Maitu Njugira*) and Waigwa Wachira, who worked with Gecau on the latter.

²¹ See Annabel Maule's account as to how these measures affected the flagship of the Eurocentric theatre tradition in Kenya, the Donovan Maule Players leading to its closure. Although this company had its own theatre space and therefore did not use the KNT for productions, Maule's carefully documented narrative illuminates the constraints facing those companies Ngugi described above which remained reliant

on British imports to sustain their productions.

²² An attempted coup d'état by junior officers of the Kenya Air Force—the closest Kenya has ever come to military takeover—was thwarted by the government in August 1982. Following initial support by some students during the attempt by some students, the state cracked down hard on the UoN. Student leaders were arrested, some later imprisoned, including the chairman of the student organisation Tito Adungosi who later died in prison. There has been some speculation that *Muntu's* fate was partially caused by rumours of the impending coup among government officials, which eventually were proved to be true just a few months later. In July, just a few months later, Al Amin Mazrui, a member of faculty at Kenyatta University College (KUC) was detained in an unrelated event—in his case, following a university production of his play *Kilio cha Haki* (A Cry for Justice).

²³ Following this, the open-air theatre at Kamiriithu was razed to the ground and theatre activities in the village explicitly banned, with the area's Provincial Commissioner accusing "theatre experts" of distracting the people from adult literacy classes, thus disrupting development in the area (Ngugi *Detained* 47).

²⁴ See Micere Mugo's account of her flight into exile and its consequences ("Prolonged Writer's Block").

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CHAPTER TWO

From Intellectual Space(s) to Performance Space(s): Strategies of Speaking 'Truth to Power' in Bole Butake's Drama

Christopher Odhiambo Joseph

From idea/ knowledge industry to performance spaces

This chapter, in various ways, attempts not only to exhibit Bole Butake's deployment of body and space as sites of performing and undermining power, but more importantly, his location within the black intellectual traditions. Similar to other black intellectual artists' engagements, Butake's is also interventionist. His plays and their actual performances in defined spaces gesture towards an explicit putative agency: the struggle against oppression, repression, subjugation, power abuse and exploitation. But perhaps what is interesting about Butake, is that like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan, to mention a few, he seems to recognize the vast opportunities that the performance space provides to engage with the larger public outside the confinement of universities, those intellectual prison houses. In a paper, 'Home and Exile: The African Writer's Dilemma' Butake shares intimately what led to his choice of drama and theatre medium disseminating and communicating his ideas especially among the masses. He states:

Having found the effectiveness of drama and theatre as a communication medium especially for the disadvantaged grassroots people, I have been able to continue to influence the latter through the organization of numerous theatre workshops in urban slums and villages on such diverse issues as women's and children's rights (including property ownership, widow, female genital mutilation, early marriages and pregnancies, etc), human rights and democracy, minority rights, corruption in public life, environmental sustainability, good governance, conflict resolution, HIV/AIDS, etc. Thus, I have been able to continue with my teaching at the university while using theatre for development techniques through what I call 'People Theatre' and 'People Cinema' to influence and awaken grassroots people to problems with which they deal on a daily basis. (p.9)

This pronouncement situates, in its proper perspective, Butake's shift from the more restrictive intellectual spaces to the more fluid public performance spaces. Historically speaking, intellectuals and in particular the black, have with obsessive frequency played a critical and significant role through the knowledge and idea industry in the transformation of the world and more so significantly in the struggle against inequality, exploitation, discrimination and oppression of the underprivileged in the African continent and its Diaspora. The Negritude movement for instance exemplifies the very active participation of black intellectuals in the assertion of black identity, culture and aesthetics. Butake's shift to work directly in community spaces can be interpreted as part of the larger pluralistic and mutative black intellectual traditions, ever dynamic and responsive to particular historical circumstances. For instance, the Pan African movement, as an intellectual project engaged not only in the agency of liberating the African continent but also more importantly in confronting and contesting the ideological discourses and paradigms of the colonizing west. As Eddy Maloka- the president of African Association of Political science (AAPS)-argues:

The Pan-African project evolved in the context of the anti-colonial struggles, and came to entail four elements: sense among Africans on the continent and those in the Diaspora of themselves as 'one' people because of common historical experience and destiny, the quest for the generation; 'awakening' or 'renaissance' of Africa on the social, culture and economic fronts as well as in global affairs; the 'dream' of an Africa united in the social, culture, economic and political spheres; and spirit of solidarity among people of African descent (2006:1).

Butake's drama and theatre practice so to speak can be located within that continuum of black intellectual tradition that emerged during the colonial period but which still remains relevant long after colonialism. But the role of the black intellectuals, such as Butake, in the post-colonial period appears to be more complicated and intricate; leading to deliberate shifts to the more public performance spaces. Indeed during this period, the African intellectual has had to frequently redefine his roles, functions and responsibilities to correspond with the dynamics of post colony. For example, in the new political, social and economic order, the black intellectual finds his responsibilities to be much wider as he must, not only engage with the past, but must also engage with the present

transforming society if his knowledge and ideas are to remain relevant. The intellectual must also now participate in the new struggles against corruption, exploitation, oppression and injustices perpetuated by the new post-colonial African leaders. This is the dilemma and paradox that Ngugi wa Thiong'o reminds us of when he comments on the role and responsibility of the African intellectual artist:

The African writer was in danger of becoming too fascinated by the yesterday of his people and forgetting the present. Involved as he was in correcting his disfigured past, he forgot his society was no longer peasant with common ownership of means of production; with communal celebration of joy and victory, communal sharing of sorrow and bereavement; his society was no longer organized on egalitarian principles. Conflicts between the emergent elitist middle-class and the masses were developing, their seeds being in the colonial pattern of social and economic development. And when he woke up to his task he was little surprised that events in post-independence Africa could take the form they had taken (1972: 44-5).

Admittedly, it is this turn of events that has defined the direction and shape of the black intellectual traditions in the postcolony. The intellectual has had to imagine new ways of projecting his material to his society. This might explain the intellectual artist fascination especially with the performance space as a possible alternative site of sharing knowledge in more similar ways with his traditional predecessors the 'griot'; that oral artist-teacher. The deliberate choice by intellectuals such as Soyinka, Ngugi, Osofisan and Butake to frame their ideas in ways that they can communicate on performance spaces resonates strongly with Edward Said's argument about how intellectuals should (re) present their ideas to the society if they expect to have influence when he reminds us that:

The intellectual does not climb a mountain or pulpit and declaim from the heights. Obviously you want to speak your piece when it can be heard best; and also you want it represented in such a way as to influence with an ongoing and actual process, for instance the cause of peace and justice. Yes, the intellectual voice is lonely, but it has resonance only because it associates itself freely with the reality of a movement, the aspirations of a people, and the common pursuit of a shared ideal (1993:75).

Reverberating Said's line of thinking, while speculating on Ngugi's shift to community theatre, Simon Gikandi opines thus:

What is important in this self-critique is not so much Ngugi's dissatisfaction with the language of theatre (although this was becoming crucial to Ngugi's culture project) but the recantation of what the author had previously seen as the foundation of his writing, namely that ideology, or content, was the most important thing in the representation, and that form was secondary (2000:185).

For these intellectual artists, the mode of representing knowledge and making it relevant to their communities can be summed in Said's words as follows:

Speaking the truth to power is no Panglossian idealism: it is carefully weighing the alternatives, picking the right one, and then intelligently representing it where it can do the most good and cause the right change (1993:75).

Performance Space as a site of play of power of bodies and over bodies

Unlike in lecture theatres where knowledge must be delivered according to laid down procedure, the performance space offers the intellectual-artist wider possibilities in terms of that which can be considered as knowledge. For instance the performance space gives the intellectual artist poetic license to strip bare and lampoon the bodies of wielders of power as well as admonish them. Most of Butake's plays engage with this stripping bare of the leader's body. As such they enable the public to gaze at the various ways in which power is consumed by the bodies of leaders and consequently the ways such powers are (ab)used on the bodies of subjects. It is in this sense therefore that Butake's plays can be interpreted as sites of performing power and bodies of both (African) leaders and their subjects. But to appreciate how he uses performance space to display the leader's body performing its power over that of his subjects, entails comprehending how power of bodies and over bodies are generally conceived.

Our conceptualisation of how power is performed, follows Michel Foucault's discourse (s) of bodies, power and politics. According to Foucault- read in Richard Harland (1987) - power is directly related to bodies. In his argument, the direct relation between power and bodies can be seen as operating in either of the two ways: One way is of power over bodies. Here power relations have an immediate hold upon (the body),

they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. Thus essentially power is a function of performance within specific relations and spaces.

Like puppeteers, those in leadership positions often use their powers to extract productive service from the bodies of their subjects: controlling their acts and attitudes from within. Though these manipulations are effected symbolically through language and sign, the reality is that they gesture more towards performance. Perhaps a good example can be drawn from Chinua Achebe's *The Trouble with Nigeria* where he describes how a military leader appropriated the imagined public performance space- that is the nation- the space of the 'every day performances' to restore sanity through symbolic performance of his body's way of power :

On the morning after Murtala Mohammed seized power in July 1975 public servants in Lagos were found "on seat" at seven thirty in the morning. Even the "go slow" traffic that had defeated every solution and every regime vanished overnight from the street. Why? The new ruler's reputation for ruthlessness was sufficient to transform on the course of only one night the style and habit of Nigeria's unruly capital (1983:1)

This is a perfect example of the body's way of power over other bodies. The other way of power is that of the body's own power, the body's own force of Will and Desire. This way of power of bodies exhibits itself through symbolic performance spaces in opposition to the way of power over bodies. For Foucault, this is the source of all revolution. Thus, in Foucauldian speak, politics and power are never restricted to the general class relations - but also manifest in domestic relations, schooling relations, parent-child relations and sexual relations, all signifying different spaces of performing power both private and public. Nevertheless, so to speak, bodies appropriate performance spaces to express political action through protest, demonstrations and of course physical confrontation. But it is important to point out, reiterating Foucault, that the body is usually political only when it is used as a symbol.

Performance Space and parodies of the leader's body

In post-colonial Africa, the main problem has been the manner in which bodies of leaders have performed power over the bodies of their subjects in those spaces fondly referred to as nation states. Many intellectual artists

through their performances have parodied these sometimes grotesque bodies. Wole Soyinka for instance in his satirical political plays, particularly *Kongi's Harvest* and *King Baabu*, exhibits the body of the leader in the public performance space as an object of eliciting laughter. This is one way, in which the subjects' bodies, stand in opposition to the power emanating from the leader's body.¹

Butake's drama project on the body of the post colonial African leader echoes Soyinka's. His plays provide symbolic spaces of parodying the bodies of the leaders in their performance of power in its raw. Thus, a reading of Butake's plays often reveals a playwright who is anxiously concerned with the way power is performed in that space, that is, Cameroon nation, but which of course can be a metaphor of any post-colonial space in Africa. His plays *Lake God; The Survivors; Shoes and Four Men in Arm; Dance of the Vampire; The Rape of Michelle; Betrothal without Libation; Family Saga* all signify in varied dimensions the ways of power of bodies over bodies and their diverse implications for progress and development within the specificities of their setting. In *Lake God* for instance, Butake dramatizes the dilemma of a community in transition. However, the point that seems to be stressed is that before contact with western civilization, this community hardly had any problems issuing on how power should be performed. As Laghman, one of the characters in the play observes:

I do not question the wonderful things Father Leo has brought to this land. But I blame the Fon for allowing himself to be misled by Father Leo. Was it not the late Fon who allowed Father Leo to start the school? But he continues to rule the land in the way it had always been ruled. He continues to lead the people in the yearly sacrifice to the Lake God to settle in the Land. Is there Kwifon in this land today? The Fon has reported the Kwifon to gomna and Kwifon is in detention (*Lake God*: 31; *all subsequent mentions will be signified with LG*)

The society that for a long time enjoyed social equilibrium begins to show signs of tensions, conflicts and raptures when a singular body begins to consume and digest all power. The influx of Western civilization and its disruptive structures provide the new Fon (the traditional chief) with tricks of how to monopolize power. This new order is obviously incongruent with the traditional set-up where power was consciously dispersed in

different bodies such as the “Kwifon” and “Fibuen”. Unsurprisingly, it is this congestion of power in the singular body of the Fon that sets off the new culture of corruption and abuse of authority in the community. However, there is a tinge of irony in the power relations between the Fon and his patron saint Father Leo. Indeed what emerges clearly is that the Fon is merely a figure head. He is, in the true sense of the word, just a puppet, a conduit that Father Leo wittingly manipulates to exploit resources. As Forgwei, a character in the play aptly notes:

“We agree that the Fon is to blame for what is happening in the land. Being the illiterate that I am, I could not submit myself to the power of Father Leo the way our Fon has” (LG: 31).

Father Leo’s deceptive way of exercising power follows Foucault’s idea that the way of power of bodies over other bodies usually does not appear in the form of negative repressive power but actually appears in the form of a positive expansionist power; power bent on generating forces making them grow rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them to submit or destroying them. Interestingly, as a result, members of the community direct their anger and hostility towards the body of the Fon, instead of that of the real culprit, Father Leo. That is why Forgwei unwittingly credits Father Leo:

But Father Leo has done a lot of good to us. The school for our children, the health centre where we all in time of sickness, good water and a motor road. Without Father Leo, our women and children might still be going about naked. Today, we have Fon who can speak and gomna will listen. Would this have been possible? Without Father Leo? (LG: 30).

Nonetheless, the question that one might want to ask is how Father Leo extracts power from the body of the Fon into his own body? The Fon feels passionately indebted to Father Leo for initiating him into the ‘civilized’ Western mannerisms through education and religion (Christianity). In return Father Leo takes control of his body. For instance, when he (Fon) seems to be losing faith in the Christian God, Father Leo promptly performs a ritual upon his body to ensure that his loyalty remains intact to him (Father Leo) and the church as opposed to his own people and their traditions. The following conversation between the Fon and Father Leo reveals as much:

Father Leo: That seems to be the only language that will pacify him. In civilized society he would be chained in a home for the mentally disturbed.

Father Leo: We will never catch-up with Europe, Father. We will never catch-up. Thank God you came. Praise is to Jesus who sent out his disciples to convert the heathen.

Father Leo: I have converted most of the pagans in this village except the mad Shay. He is always talking about sacrificing to his lake god.

Fon: He will never be converted, Father. He is the priest of the Lake God just as you are the priest of the Almighty God in heaven.

Father Leo: How dare you, Fon! How dare you make such a comparison! In spite of all my efforts? In spite of all that I have done for you? You even dare to make reference to illusion in my presence?

Fon: Sorry Father I am very sorry, Father. Very very sorry Father it was a slip of the tongue.

Father Leo: My dear Fon, you must choose between Satan and God. Why do you allow such evil thoughts to bother you? It must be Lucifer. Where is my vial of holy water (*He searches his pockets and brings out a vial which he sprinkles on the Fon*). I bless you in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit (LG: 10)

In the end, the Fon becomes literally and metaphorically impotent. But in a twist of irony, his impotence is transferred to the bodies of all his male subjects. The impotence is catalyzed by the detention, through the instigation of Father Leo, of Kwifon the symbol of the male power in this society. This creates serious power vacuum that eventually compels the women to react to the ways of power symbolized in the bodies of the Fon and Father Leo that have turned the bodies of their men into impotent zombies. Women literally and figuratively deploy their own bodies in the ways of this power by confronting the authority of the Fon and Father Leo. For the women, this is both a political act of subversion and revolution meant to provoke their men into action. Their first act of rebellion is the revival of their secret society, the Fibuen, which has been dormant since the Fon took over power. They coalesce around this secret society, using it as a site to perform rituals. It is these rituals that revitalize the feminine power of their bodies into an agency of transformation. The effect of this ritual on their bodies reiterates Foucault's idea that there is (also) a symbolism of the body that can be used in political action and can be turned against the hegemonic system of episteme(s).

Indeed it is the change that has taken place in the women that stir men into action. First, reviving the Kwifon, then confronting the Fon with the proposition to perform a ritual to the Lake God as a form of penitence for his transgressions. When he defies they decide to offer his body to the Lake God as a sacrifice so that the societal equilibrium can be restored. Unfortunately, their action is too late. Analogous to the book of Genesis where the Christian God uses the floods to cleanse the first generation of mankind for transgression, the Lake God in a state of fury decimates the entire community, except for five people, in retaliation to Fon's transgressing against her and the ways of the land.

In the play, *The Survivors*, which reads like a sequel to *Lake God*, once again Butake, dramatizes the ways of power of bodies over other bodies, and the bodies' own way over power. In this play we are introduced to five survivors of the holocaust on their way to a place called Ewawa where they expect to find succour. However, their expectations are thwarted by the body of a military officer who physically and figuratively acts as an obstacle to their passage. The officer's body in fact can be read as a metaphor of the post-colonial African leader's body that persistently acts as an obstacle in the path of progress of his own people. This play, however, seems to imply that through "Will and Desire" the ways of power of bodies over other bodies can be refracted. As such, in the play, the female body, that is, the character Mboysi becomes the site of performing ways of power of bodies over bodies and the converse. Initially the Officer sexually exploits Mboysi's body in return for favours. But later, Mboysi realizes that she can use the power of her body to conquer the Officer. She deceives him to submit to her, and subsequently asks him to give her his gun, and in a daring act of rebellion shoots him. But unfortunately just at her a moment of triumph she (Mboysi) is killed by another Officer.

Officer: Walahi! She was really a beautiful woman. I now understand. But where did she get those crazy ideas from? And a woman with such beauty! Very strange, indeed what a beautiful body to waste! Strange. Very strange! (*The Survivors*: 85).

The frequency with which Butake engages with the performance of power and its way of bodies and over bodies actually becomes motific in his works. In *And Palm wine will Flow* he uses an imaginary traditional setting to comment on the ways of power over bodies and vice versa. This setting of the performance within a traditional context seems to be a deliberate

effort to defamiliarize the topicality of Cameroonian politics. This is obviously one of his strategies of speaking truth to power. This imaginary setting, framed upon traditional memories, acts as a template of possibilities where issues of governance and democracy are laid bare and interrogated. *And Palm wine will Flow* as is characteristic of Butake's plays is about a new Fon (leader) who has inherited the seat of power from his late father. In an attempt to entrench his own authority, he dismantles all the traditional systems of governance. For instance, he makes the council of elders irrelevant by usurping all its powers, which he then invests in his own body. This leads to a conflict between him and Shey Ngong, the chief priest of Nyombom. The way that the Fon consumes power is captured in a very exhilarating way through the symbolism of palm wine. As the palm wine gets into the head of the Fon, so does he get drunk with power. In the end, the Fon and his coterie of sycophants, literally and figuratively, get drunk with power. The Fon performs power brutally, torturing the bodies of those who stand in opposition. The following conversation between the Taper and Shey Ngong aptly captures this scenario:

Tapper: The palm-bush! The palm-bash! The palm.....

Shey Ngong: Speak up, fellow! What happened to the palm-bush?

Tapper: The Fon has seized the palm-bush. His watch-dogs are there now. Getting drunk on the wine I tapped. Look at my clothes! All torn! In tatters!

Shey Ngong: Your clothes were never whole, my man. But did you try to fight him?

Tapper: I thought I could drive them out. In fact I thought it was some joke.

But...But....

Shey Ngong: You are not a cow that can knock out a horde of flies.

Tapper: They were many, Shey. Three of them. And I was alone.

Shey Ngong: Never try to fight another's battle for him. They could have killed you. And what would I tell your wife and children?

Tapper: They beat me up severely. I found them in my hut, where I store palm-wine. They ere already drunk. And they had finished a whole pot of wine which I had tapped yesterday. When I asked them about what they wanted they laughed and said the palm bush had reverted to the Fun, its rightful owner.

Shey Ngong: They said that?

Tapper: (Laughing) Asked me to inform you that your spy, Nsangong had been caught (*And Palmwine Will Flow*: 107)

This conversation in a way acts as a comment on how power has gotten into the head of the Fon. It is worth noting that the palm-bush that the Fon has confiscated as well as the palm wine that are harvested from it, are strictly meant to be used in the rituals of libation to the gods and not for any mortals. Thus the Fon's action is a direct challenge to the powers of the gods. From the conversation we are made aware of the fact that the Fon is abusive in the way that he directs the way of power of his own body over the bodies of his subject. This is evident through the brutality meted on the bodies of the characters - Tapper and Nsangong. But in a kind of reversal of fortunes following Foucault's idea that 'bodies' subjected to power do have their own way of power against power's way over bodies, the people eventually counter Fon's power. The elaborate report by Tapper to Shey Ngong bears witness:

I was coming to that Shey. When those rogues threw me out of the bush, I took the road leading here because I knew you would be waiting. Halfway through, I met with Tashi. You know Tashi; don't you? It was he who gave me the details. The things that are happening in this land are pregnant, he said. Imagine a respectable man like Nsangong, tied with ropes to a Kola nut tree as if he were a cow and whipped by worthless thieves. Yes. They whipped him thoroughly until he begun to bleed in several places. Then some people in the crowd intervened and carried him to his compound. He could no longer walk. But, I tell you, Nsangong is a man. During all that time he was being tortured, he never opened his mouth. Not even a sound of anguished pain or despair. That man is a man. It was his courage that encouraged some people to intervene and so saved his life, Tashi concluded. What did the rest do? The festivity continued, I asked? How could the festivity continue? Can you hear any drumming or singing? The feasting stopped, suddenly. The people have all dispersed (*Palmwine*: 99).

The act of intervention, that the Tapper makes mention of, by the crowd maybe interpreted as the bodies own way of power against the ways of power of the leader's body. Thus at end of the drama, the bodies of the Fon and his sycophants are completely dismembered revealing his subjects' way of power over his body and those of his cronies. Thus for Butake, using one of his characters as a mouth piece, power should never again be consolidated in the body of one person. He argues that power and its

performance should always be a negotiated subject by all interested parties possibly in imagined public performance spaces such as the market place. The following conversation should suffice our illustration:

Kwengong: The people will rule through the Council of Elders led by Shey, here. The day that he takes wrong decision, that same day, the people shall meet in the market place and put another at the head of the Council of Elders.

Shey Ngong: And the affairs of the land shall be debated in the market place.

Tapper: Wonderful idea! So that all the people shall see clearly that the fowl has an anus. Wonderful idea! No more secrets in the land. *Kwengong (to Tapper)* Sound the bugle and let the people assemble in the market place.

Shey Ngong: No not the bugle. We break clean from the past. Take the sacred gong of Nyombom and let it resound in all the nooks and corners of the land. From today, this bugle will stay here in the sacred grove, a living symbol of our enslavement by the Fon and his notables. Take the sacred gong to the people and let its sound vibrate through their soul, a symbol of their liberation (Palmwine: 113)

It is obvious from the tone of the above conversation that Butake envisions democracy and good governance practices. These practices, however, seem to be a chimera in post colonial African states. Even though Butake uses the past as a template in this play, it is actually a mere ploy to comment on the contemporary political situation in his country. That, for me, is what constitutes his strategy as an intellectual-artist speaking truth to power, without providing power with a space to perform injury on his body.

Performance space as a site for dialogue and healing

In Butake's latest play, *Family Saga*, the performance space is imbued with possibilities of dialogue and healing beyond those of ridicule, laughter and reprehension witnessed in his earlier political plays. In this play in particular, he seems to be more concerned with creating possibilities for cosmic tranquil where antagonistic ways of power of bodies can be neutered. He seems to aver that this can only be possible in a space where dialogue can be privileged. This is reflected in the centrality of forum theatre techniques in the play's plot. *Family Saga* is arguably a play of conflict and healing structured on sibling rivalry pitting two brothers against each other as its title obviously suggests. This rivalry is kindled by acts of betrayal, exploitation and oppression of one of the brothers- Kamalo

over his other brother Kamala. Kamalo imagines that he is more superior and therefore holds the responsibility to conceive ideas which Kamala must execute. However, at the end of the play Kamalo comes to a new realization, as captured through the following statement by Kamala:

No, Brother Kamala. We cannot replace one evil with another.

Henceforth all decisions and actions shall be participatory.

We shall all conceive and execute each according to his ability... (*Family Saga*: 84).

This position alludes to Harland's interpretation of Foucault's vision on power that:

Power is too deeply ingrained, it is 'always already there', and Foucault's Nietzschean way of thinking gives no reason to suppose that the power of some bodies would ever cease to entail a power over other bodies. If a post revolutionary state of society is to represent any improvement over the existing state; it must be by virtue of a loosening and unstructuring of power relations: power relations would still exist, but in ever-changing ever flowing form. There would be no permanent appropriations of power. Indeed, power-relations might be envisaged in terms of creative play, whereby controls would be set up only in order to be transgressed (*Harland 1987*: 164-5).

By envisaging power in terms such as those of creative play, Butake conjures performance space as a ritualistic site open to possibilities of transformation and healing. *Family Saga* is structurally a very intricate dramatic text: self reflexive, frequently making reference to its process of creation as a dramatic text as well as a performance artefact; always gesturing to its process of creation and defying closure as a self constituting performance entity. It manifests itself as a hybridized text that oscillates on the margins of both canonical theatre and the more popular variants of applied drama. This is evident in the deployment of 'workshop' kind of theatre making techniques framed within the structure of a play within the play. These technique allow the characters to engage at different planes of 'realities and experiences' beyond their own (de)scribed characters and roles. But more importantly, the 'workshop' and play within the play enables the playwright to draw extensively from panoply of applied drama and theatre practices which, as would be expected, liberally utilizes the performance space for both transformative and therapeutic possibilities.

Admittedly, the 'workshop' and the play within the play techniques allow Butake to deploy within the structure of this play some aspects of forum theatre, playback theatre and traditional narration performances. These aspects of applied theatre and drama—largely therapeutic and transformative—facilitates processes of expiation and healing in the tense and fractured 'worlding' that is portrayed in *Family Saga*. As Joseph S. Salemi would aptly remind us though from a different context but which equally applies to *Family Saga*:

Art is the ultimate expiation, for through it not only suffering, but falsehood which lies at the core of existence is transfigured beyond the pettiness and sordidness of its context and origins...the shaky edifice of falsehood trembles and falls, and this final counterpoint of upward release and triumph and downward collapse and fatality is arts perfect image of both man's implication in falsehood, and his capacity for redemption (1977:136).

Fundamental to this reading is the way in which *Family Saga* is framed to reveal both the falsehoods and truths and at the same time offer man the capacity for redemption. The employment of 'the workshop' and the play within the play, as modes of structuring, as previously intimated, enables the conflation of different planes of experiences and realities, collapsing the boundaries of the double fictional realities in the world of the characters. For instance, in the first plane of fictional reality, Sawa (Kamala's daughter) is emotionally grappling with the post rape traumatic experiences which she attempts to purge (out) by taking recourse in mourning. It is worth noting that it is at this very point in the plot of the play that Butake introduces the 'workshop' and play within the play techniques, aesthetically intersecting the two planes of 'fictional realities'. At this point the 'real' and the 'world of play' are dissolved into one as the characters are constantly playing on the margins of the two planes of 'fictional realities'. Significantly, it is within the spheres of this ambiguous site, the very archetypal ritualistic space that expiation and healing actually happen. The following excerpt is illustrative:

Sawa: (Joining them) Daddy, you are there to take care of us na? See na, just for the short time of your going, see what happened to me na? You know what is good for us na? When I think of it, I will only just be crying na? Just be crying. *(She begins to sob).*

Ngong: Father, I said it. A toad is not a frog even though they look alike. *(Kamala begins to sob too. Before long Sawa is wailing, followed by Kamala.)*

Father...father... what is going on? What has happened to you, father, or I will cry too. (*Father nods head and Ngong burst into wailing. A short while later, Kamala smiles through his sobs and soon is laughing heartily until he rolls on the ground. Ngong is the first to join in the laughter followed by Sawa. They laugh very loud and most heartily*). Father, when did you become so playful? One minute you're wailing like a woman and the next one you are laughing your heart to the skies. (FS, 41-2).

Another related excerpt below reiterates this:

Ngong: Sawa, stop it! You want us to start...to start...to start... (He too is sobbing. Kamala does not join).

Kamala: We can't do the same exercise over and over. Give me your hands. Let's form a circle and play some other games.

Sawa: I don't want to play, daddy. You don't know what that man did to me na? I don't want to play anything na?

Ngong: Father, we came out here to think, not play. We have problems, father.

Kamala: If we don't play we can not think. And, don't forget that Kamalo has ordered us to prepare folk dances for his entertainment and amusement of his papa. And ...the threats from our new companions. You heard them, didn't you? So let's get into a nice little circle and start preparing the folk dances (FS, 44).

The 'double fiction' of the world of the play on the proscenium arch stage and the real lived world of the spectators in the auditorium are dissolved in the performance, disrupting the dichotomy between the world of the actors and that of the spectators. This collapsing of boundaries is significant as this play is a metaphor of the Cameroonian nation, beset with a major conflict between the Anglophones and the Francophone Cameroon speakers; symbolized, as such in the rivalry of the two brothers, Kamala and Kamalo. As such, the techniques Butake deploys in this play are consciously selected to facilitate the transformation of the performance space into a dialogic site for conversations and negotiations of healing and national reconciliation.

Sawa: (Nodding in the direction of the spectators). Let's ask for volunteers among them na/ They are only sitting there smiling at us and doing nothing na? Let's go and get some of them to join us na? (Sawa, Ngong and Kamala go into spectators and return with as many volunteers as they can find...Actors and spectators form a circle and perform dances such as the Njang, Bensikin, Ndong, Bagalum, etc. Then they engage in simple relaxation exercises for controlled breathing and the body).

Kamala: (Addressing spectators) Good people, this is only the beginning. But a very promising one. We will be practising here every day until Kamalo comes to see what we have prepared for his entertainment and amusement of his papa. Will you, please, kindly join us every day for the practice session? As you can see, dancing and play are good for the heart and the soul; for the body and the mind...

Ngong: I feel like a kite sailing high up in the blue, sunny sky. I have never known that dancing is very good medicine.

Sawa: All the heaviness in my head is finished na? My body is very light and I am feeling very happy na? Daddy, we will be dancing every day na/ Even after uncle Kamalo's folk dance na?...*(FS, 46-7).*

Through the workshop technique, Butake introduces theatre games and exercises on the performance space which in a way are meant to invite the spectators to join the actors on stage. These theatre games are interestingly deployed to open up vistas for exposing the main problems that face Cameroon as a national entity albeit metaphorically.

Kamala: Can I present my problems or where do we start?

Sawa: Daddy, let me start na? My own problems are just too many na?

Ngong: You can start, Sawa. After that I will give mine. And father will be last cocoyam. But remember that you are giving only three, the most important three of your very many important problems. Not so far?

Kamala: That's what we agreed. Each of us will present three of their most pressing problems from the most to the least important. That was our collective decision. Sawa, over to you.

Sawa: My three problems are: uncle Kamalo, no mother and poverty na? These are my three problems na?

Ngong: You are really wonderful, Sawa. How did you come to think of no mother? We have grown up without a mother all our lives. I am sure that one will even surprise father; not so?

Kamala: Let's present the problems first. We will discuss them later. But let us do the presentations. Ngong your turn. *(FS, 50-51)*

Through the games the characters are able to identify and analyse the problems facing them. Through the analysis of the problems, they discover that the knowledge of their past is quintessential for healing and reconciliation to take place. This is because the past impacts significantly on their present and future. It is on realizing that the past is crucial that

they begin the process of recovering it through re-enactments of memory. Thus to retrieve this truth and knowledge of the past, Butake takes recourse partly in the techniques of traditional oral narrations as well as in aspects of playback theatre: that very type of improvisational theatre founded by Jonathan Fox in New York in 1975 and which generally involves a process in which the audience stories are played to them instantaneously by a group of actors (Fox 1994). However, in Butake's drama, unlike the orthodox playback theatre, the stories to be told are not personalized but are of a mythic dimension as the problems faced by the characters are political and as such transcend individual personal narratives. This is consistent with Wolin's explanation cited in Clarke E. Cochran (2002:425) that: "The identity of a political society revolves around the myths and stories that its citizens remember and retell about themselves." Thus Butake's healing project anticipates the reconstruction and public performance of the founding myths. As Cochran aptly reminds us; "communal memory does not mean living in the past; it means keeping the past in mind in a way that draws guidance for the future" (2002:441). For Kamala and his children, the healing process begins when they reconnect with the material of the memory that they have been exiled from for along time. The unearthing of this memory marks the beginning of their conscientization.

Sawa: It is not good to be in the dark na? Now like this I am very happy na? All the people like Kamalo who pretend that they have power, it is just because they know certain things na? Which other people don't know na?

Ngong: Knowledge is power! Father, of all the things that you have ever done for us, this one is the best. Going out to look for the story of our family has been the best school that we have gone to. (*to spectators*) Good people, the best inheritance that you can give to your children is giving them education, information. A person who is informed, who is aware of his surroundings, who is educated, can never become the slave of another man or woman. I am now ready, we are ready to dance for Kamalo and his papa not because we are their slaves but because knowledge has liberated us and given us dignity, pride and a sense of purpose in life. Father, we will dance for Kamalo with all our hearts, souls and minds. I have never been so proud of these rags that have been symbol of our enslavement after what I have learnt about our family.

Kamala: My dear children, good people, now I know that the easiest way to make someone your slave is to deny that person knowledge. To deny that person an identity. To deny that person the story of his roots, origins. In short the best

way to make someone your slave is to take away that person's identity and give them yours. That is what Kamalo tried to do to me and my children. (FS, 60-61).

Performance of memory awakens the consciousness of Kamala and his children. It frees them from multiple layers of repressed memories, but more importantly empowers them to confront Kamalo. This confrontation in a public performance space is important because their healing cannot be fully realized without Kamalo's expiation: an act which is eventually actualized through the therapeutic and transformative powers of both forum and playback theatre techniques deployed in this play. The performance of the founding myth (myth of origin) confronts Kamalo with aspects of his past that have always eluded him, denying him a sense of his true identity,

The re-enactment of the myth is in a sense analogical to a performance of a ritual of expiation, cleansing, exorcism and healing. This follows closely Soyinka's assertion that: "The logic of "Truth and Reconciliation" however demands that the mind prepare itself for the spectacle of a penitent". (1999:28). Thus Kamalo's expiatory act and Sawa's healing are inextricably intertwined. The truth is unpacked as Kamalo's acts are laid bare. He accepts his sins and is in return forgiven by the rest of the family that he has transgressed against. The enactment of the myth of the origin enables him to come to terms not only with his past but perhaps more with the magnitude of his transgressions. He realizes that all along he has been violating and enslaving his blood brother and his children. Thus truth, to use the idiom that has become a cliché, sets him free. Butake's project is apparently not intended to assign blame but to provide a site for expiation, healing and reconciliation through the transformative powers of the materiality of memory. Thus as Klein (2000:130) reminds us, "...memory serves as a critical site for the generation and inflection of affective bonds..." Invoking traditional communal rituals of cleansing, Kamalo like the biblical prodigal son is eventually reconciled with his family. But what is more profound in this exploration is the way in which performance space is utilized to open new and alternative possibilities that the intellectual artist might not have through the pages of written texts or the lecture theatres.

Notes

¹ For an interesting and detailed analysis of how the common people ridicule and laugh at the grotesque, unproportional bodies of leaders in postcolony, see Achille Mbembe “ Provisional Notes on the Postcolony” in *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 62.No.1.(1992), Pp3-37.

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CHAPTER THREE

Sigana and the fight for Performance Space in Kenya: A case for Indigenous Theatre in Kenya

Amadi kwaa Atsiaya

Over the years, theatre has been performed in various forms and during occasions of varying significance. In Kenya, theater has indeed been under intense pressure, to an extent whereby it is seen as producing nothing. Nothing notable is reported about theatre in national documents; not in our annual budgets that have been prepared since independence, not even in the myriad sessional papers and strategic plans that the ministries that end up housing culture and the arts develop every five years. In this respect, Kenyan theatre finds itself in contention with other items or branches of our culture such as music, athletics and the like, for space, both in terms of physical space and other forms of recognition such as being given a function to play in the society. Within this wider struggle lie other undercurrents that subsist as far as the arts are concerned, and the way they stand in relation to one another. In order to clearly understand this scenario, it would help to take a peek at the road we have been traveling; the experiences that we have met on this road, the injuries we have picked walking down this road, and the repercussions of the latter on our collective psyche as a nation.

Let me state from the onset that, the search for and appropriation of space is a power issue. When one has space, then one has power. Power earns one a lot of space, and space thus buttresses this power, and that is how one stamps authority on the rest who do not have similar power and as a result, space. The use of space is also closely related to power because the basic laws of kinesics ascribe more manna to raised spaces and those that are in front. The space that is more brightly lit or colored has more manna than the one that is lit in dull and non-flamboyant hues , for did not God manifest to Moses in a flame of fire?

First, it is out of purely selfish colonial considerations that Kenyan theatre was dabbled into by the colonialists. Therefore, physical spaces

such as the Kenya National Theatre, plus a proliferation of other so called Little Theatres in places like Kitale and Mombasa, all this was an act in hiving off alienating space, were erected specifically to serve the hedonistic palate of the colonialists and those who benefited from that system. Popular indigenous theatre, which had existed from yore, was discouraged and instead something preferred which was described, prescribed and only best understood by the colonialist. This form of performance had its own aesthetics, which the colonialist did not find in the African version, and as was to be expected, the colonial view of African arts was highly patronizing and scornful. Writing in *Moving the Center*, Ngugi says:

“The infamous Berlin conference of 1884 saw the beginning of formal British influence in Kenya, but the country was not really colonized until 1895. Of course it wasn’t given to them. The British colonized Kenya by force. But right from the start, military and subsequently political domination went hand in hand with cultural dominance. The route to effective control lay through cultural national festivals, which of course meant a gathering of peoples, these were stopped. A good example was the *ituika* ceremony in central Kenya which was banned by the British colonial authorities in 1925. The *ituika* festival was held every thirty years or so to mark the handing over of power from one generation to another. This was enacted through songs, poetry and drama...Under the colonial rule, then, native cultures were repressed while, through the school system, other imported traditions were encouraged...(1993:88).”

This scenario as painted by Ngugi portends a very grim future for the colonized cultures, whose repercussions reverberate through the reality of the arts in the post colony. Still writing in *Moving the Center*, Ngugi further bemoans the lack of genuine independence when the nation was allowed to fly its own flag on December 12th 1963. He thus laments:

“Post-colonial Kenya economically and politically saw in reality a continuation of colonial structures. Colonial society can be looked at as a social pyramid with the people divided on racial lines and occupying the different zones. The narrow part at the top was occupied by the white settler community, the middle part by the Asian community, and the broad base by the Africans.....This has been reflected in Kenyan culture, for instance, in the kind of programmes encouraged by the post colonial regimes. It is a culture that has reflected the dependence of the Kenyan economy and politics on outside influence. Western cultural dominance has been

underwritten by the post-colonial practices, for instance by what has been allowed on television, on film, and in educational programmes" (pp 90).

Ngugi's arguments as quoted above serve us with two important lessons. One is that the arts in Kenya, just as any other institution, are under pressure exerted from the dominating powers. Two, the kind of arts that have got a hope for survival, are the art forms that are informed by the dominant culture, and in our case, it is sadly the culture of the neo-colonialist and the imperialist that is still holding sway. If our own arts were banned, then what is our reference point? Westerners look upon the renaissance as one of the periods that produced very beautiful works of art and architecture in which the West still takes prides. If they dominated us, oppressed and repressed our reference points, then how do we necessarily proceed without being given guidance by those who lent us their practices, which we know very little about? This problem can be referred to as a technicality, which the dominant powers put in place so as to put the natives in line, as it were.

At another level there is the mental state in the post colony resulting from undergoing such a debilitating system as colonization. Writing in *Cultural Production and Social Change in Kenya*, Bantu Mwaura observes that:

"For the Kenyan youth, the image of the past that they have and continue to be bombarded with is that in which localized systems-cultural, economic and political-continue to be seen as playing second fiddle to the "mighty" West's "civilized modernity". The knowledge of the past for the youth remains that in which the white man-and in the postcolonial era the West generally - for indeed even the Africans in the Diaspora are seen as being part of this West- is superior, his ways civilized and his being as the source of all salvation" (2007:68).

More harming than even the physical scars that were inflicted upon the Kenyan struggling to free himself from colonialism were the mental scars and wounds, which still fester and may need a lot more dedication and concerted effort to clear. The colonial system prepared a future where the native would laugh at his genuine self. This is especially so because, even the picture that has been preserved of this native is already distorted. The native, bereft of his original works, some of which were banned, now finds himself a perpetual student, getting lessons from the imperialist. There is

no way he will lead. He shall forever wait for direction from across the big ocean. This is sadly the area where the colonialist succeeded most - the dismembering of the natives' collective psyche. Fanon observes in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it...When we consider the efforts made to carry out the cultural estrangement so characteristic of the colonial epoch, we realize that nothing has been left to chance and that the total result looked for by colonial domination was indeed to convince the natives that colonialism came to lighten their darkness. The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back in to barbarism, degradation and bestiality." (p. 169).

Foreign lands and foreign ways are looked at with awe and admiration. The extent to which one has assimilated foreign values and practices becomes the measure of his/her success as a modern person. Writing about his native Martinique, which is a former French colony, Frantz Fanon observes in *Black Skins White Masks*:

"There is a kind of magic vault of distance, and the man who is leaving next week for France creates around himself a magic circle in which the words Pais, Marseille, Pigalle become the keys to the vault. He leaves for the pier, and the amputation of his being diminishes as the silhouette of his ship grows clearer. In the eyes of those who have come to see him off he can read the evidence of his own mutation, his power. 'Goodbye bandanna, good-bye straw hat...' (pp23)

What Fanon describes is true of Kenya as a post colony. Bantu Mwaura (ibid) has at the center of his story the myriad questions people asked him after learning that he had come back home from America. This can be found mutated into the endless dreams to go to some Western capital or village in order to make life better, the endless attempts we make at the green card, the many times we make visa applications to go to Europe for a purpose we don't know...This permeates through into the arts and theatre, where the indigenous art forms still play second fiddle to Western theatre. Little has been done to promote our local arts. Sigana, as an indigenous art form has emerged out of this state of affairs, and asserted

itself onto the Kenyan scene, as one of the art forms, whose suppression started long during the colonial days. Since all the definitions of theatre and its origin tend to alienate Africa from this vital source and resource, we may want to know what others say about African theatre and its dynamics. Although the voices advocating for African theatre are few owing to the situation outlined above, we may refer to a few. The first is Birihanze writing in *Viewpoints*. He says:

We know that the traditional African theatre expression is song, dance, ritual, ceremony and story-telling. Each of these may be a performance in itself, or a performance may be made up of, or include, several of these. (pp. 75-76).

Given this kind of definition, we would want to ask ourselves whether or not our theatre meets these needs. It is in the circumstances that our theatre lacked a real Africanist agenda that the proponents of Sigana came up with the idea of having something that could fill in the gaps that were seen within the social and arts framework. As Birihanze rightly points out above, storytelling is one of the oldest forms of art in the world. It forms the basis of African theatre, for most African stories were never just told in jest. They had to have context and a moral. As colonialism overran the African traditional ways of life, the kind of environment that so ably bred storytelling was ravaged, and new settlement patterns acquired. Thus was born the city and its attendant characteristics, both geographical and social. Mukulu, writing in a book entitled *Amegitso Ku Vana* (Teachings for Children) describes the Maragoli¹ family set up whereby the bon fire is very prominent. In discussing *Chotero* (bon fire), where he says that the family would settle down in the evening, with the man and his sons sitting by the bon fire, telling stories and the boys being taught about “how to be a man”. On the other hand, the womenfolk would sit by the kitchen fire and discuss womanhood and its attributes.

The environment within which sigana has emerged is different from what Mukulu tells us about the Maragoli family, which is representative of many families across Africa. The fire place most commonly available is the T.V, and as people like Bantu Mwaura (2007) have already noted, it is the most alienating of fireplaces. So, sigana an art-form struggling to establish its niche among the performing arts, also suffers from the lack of space granted to local theatre programs. This, in an environment where

performance has since left the innocent ambience of homes where whole families would gather and perform together and moved to specialized locations specially designed for this. It is within this spatial domain that we witness the Kenya National Theatre, Goethe Institute, French Culture and Cooperation Center, Breaburn Theatre, Phoenix, Kenya Cultural Center....These venues, by sheer design are not suited for purely African performances. Still advocating for African Theatre, Birihanze (ibid) emphasizes:

The stage auditorium arrangement must be discarded. But that in itself is not enough to change the basis of the performer-spectator relationship completely. There must be a conscious change in the methods of acting ... (pp. 75)

Birihanze thus indicts the modern Western style which is set up in a manner insensitive to African theatre. Sigana had to reclaim its space amidst difficulties. The problem of space was manifest early enough in the late 1960s and captured by Kerr when he says:

Soon after independence, however, more progressive elements in the Kenyan intelligentsia began to demand a national Kenyan theater. These demands culminated in the building in 1969 of the Kenya Cultural Center (which was to be the centre of a variety of indigenous cultural activities) and a more conventional stage-the Kenya National Theatre. A Kenyan, Seth Adagala was appointed as the first artistic director, with a mandate to create a theatre which would reflect the national aspirations of post independence Kenya. The high hopes proved difficult to realize. Adagala found his creativity constrained by the machinations of a neo-colonial bureaucracy. (pp. 106)

This is a manifestation of a situation where physical space in itself is a constraint on the theatre in Kenya. We can see few and isolated spaces being few, and in the case of the National Theatre, a colonial hangover that harbours resentment toward things closer home. That is debilitating, especially to the non-mainstream trends like Sigana, coupled with the state of decline in the services offered by the theatre spaces, led by the Kenya National Theatre, as stated by Joy Mboya, in *Cultural Production and Social Change in Kenya*:

These realities [leading to the establishment of the GoDown Arts Center as an alternative theatre and visual arts space] included firstly that from the

mid-seventies, there was a steady decline of the Kenya National Theatre, a potential anchor of artistic creativity in Kenya. Second was the ongoing absence of a cultural policy framework for the development of arts and culture” (pp. 169).

While the intelligentsia called for change and a revert to authentic Kenyan art forms, the political bureaucrats were stuck in the colonial rut, in which the country has been rusting ever since ‘independence’. Even the Kenya Cultural Center has had no move toward the entrenchment and foregrounding of authentic African performances. It is instead, individuals, who have been struggling to keep alight the Kenyan performance arts, and in respect to Sigana, Kenyan theatre. Many of the cultural spaces we have are foreign. It would sound funny for a German or Chinese cultural center to sponsor a play about say Lwanda Magere, or Mekatilili, or even Koitalel arap Samoei! What would motivate the Japanese culture and information center to produce a play about Muthoni Nyanjiru and the triumph of Mwangeka? So, we have them bring Dr. Umez Kiki and his orchestra, and the memorable Tokyo Dageki Dan; a complete contemporary traditional Japanese drumming orchestra. This is what they should do, in these their cultural spaces. That is their work. It would be very strange, if any one of them supported our own art forms. In their cultural spaces, we shall perform plays from scripts written in archaic forms of these foreign languages; transporting us back to the balconies and sitting rooms of these foreigners during the medieval ages. What then, do the Kenyan foreign offices show to the world about our performing arts? What work do the cultural attaches posted in these places do? Apart from a token dance here and there and a sprinkling of Swahili words –in vain really- here and there in all the irrelevant places; what kind of Kenyan art do we promote to the world? When we happen on the international stage, at whose beckon and manipulation; our own?

I would like to call sigana Kenyan theatre because of what has been said of it by others, starting with Birihanze (mentioned above), who has delineated some of the aspects of an authentic African play, to which sigana aptly conforms. In a review of one of the premier sigana shows in Nairobi, Margaretta wa Gacheru is quoted by Outa (2002) to have written:

....the oral performer has not only to captivate his audience with the quality of his or her poise, poetic eloquence, charm wit and grace, even as he

succeeds in weaving a magic web of imagery around his audience heart and head. He or she has got to tell stories that relate to people's imagination and experience, whether using folklore (like Aghan, Oby or Erastus Owuor), or street talk (like Bobby Buluma and Richard Mwendwa) or a combination of both as (Zein did)....which of course is why most of the performance that we saw on Saturday seemed to confirm that there is a genuine groundswell of growing interest in a new style of indigenous theater artistry, one of which we can say with confidence, that it's truly Kenyan...²

This is an art form whose origin is here in Kenya, with its proponents sifting practices from various communities of Kenya, which enabled them to come up with a hybrid style that easily interweaves with the cultures of the Kenyan communities. It is instructive to note that in one of the performances mounted by Mzizi Arts, one of the pioneers of sigana, there was the character of Jommo Kenyatta, who was undergoing *Tero Buru* (a Luo right of passage) and *Khuswala Kumuse* (a Bukusu³ ritual) and still remaining the Kenyatta from Central Province. The performance was a cultural mix.

Sigana fought a war, its proponents leading a campaign in the 1990s to have it recognized as an item for the schools and colleges drama festival. This in itself was a bid by sigana to claim space in the schools and colleges festival. Today, storytelling is an integral part of the entries that grace the annual event. That for sigana is a good score but unless there occurs change on the macrocosm, then the battle may be protracted. This is because on the overall, theatre in our schools is not a serious subject. The place where theatre is looked at seriously is the university, and most of the theatre that is taught at this level is Western in orientation. Where is the place for indigenous forms like sigana within our academy? On this frontier, sigana still has to fight for space.

Going back to Mboya's argument about space, sigana still has some work to do in terms of owning the space. Ownership here means the freedom to use space, or in more familiar terms, appropriating the space. Even though Birihanze speaks for African theatre, one detects a Western perspective in his argument. He creates a distinction between the performer and what he chooses to call spectators. This is contrary to what Atsiaya (2002) has noted about sigana:

If a member of the sigana audience could be likened to a person reading a novel, then perhaps he could be reading it as the novel is being written,

whereby he will make it richer by chipping in a word, a sentence, incident or two, or punctuating here and there. If he were to be compared with someone viewing a painting, then he will be together with the painter, contributing to certain aspects of the painting. It is the same when looked at as someone witnessing a building process. The sigana audience is that who is not satisfied with being presented with a complete thing. He participates in making this thing complete. Sigana defies certain conventions of Western theatre (pp. 29).

Sigana is therefore confronted with challenges in terms of physical space because the conventional spaces do not provide for the oneness of audience and performer that we have seen described above. Instead, it provides for a situation where there will necessarily be a clear distinction between those who are watching and those who are performing. The distinction of the stage is so stark, in view of a difference in light intensity, and all other physical barriers that make communion between the stage and the gallery to be laborious and discouraged. Sigana's approach to the stage is highly socialist. It gives the stage to all, just as happens in Augusto Boal's works. Everybody is a performer. Perhaps the closest description of this performer-spectator spatial relationship is best described in Harding (2002) by Julius Spencer, where he describes the three main storytelling styles in Sierra Leone among the Mende. The first two are mostly to do with historical chronology. The last one however, is a style that weaves creativity into the fact in a fresh and individual manner. The particular storyteller being researched is reported to use riddles, songs, banter, dance, mime and role play in his narration. This is what is said of his use of space:

Lele Gomba's use of space displays a high level of understanding of the dynamics of theatre. Being the master actor he is, he not only faces in all directions so that the audience can fully appreciate his performance regardless of space, the audience are drawn into the world of the Domei⁴ as active participants, and Lele Gomba thus establishes an actor-audience relationship which ensures that the flow of messages is a two-way process, so fluid that breaks in communication seldom occur (pp. 108).

That is why the concept of performance space has a broader meaning in sigana theatre than in Western theatre. This bears great semblance to the Mende example we just sampled. What about how the performer stamps his authority on this acquired space? Spencer argues in Harding (2007):

Lele Gomba's theater, in consonance with most traditional African theatrical forms, is one where music, song, dance, mime, and mimicry are fused in such a way as to produce a vibrant performance which brings the tales to life. Most writers on Mende storytelling have noted the use of gestures in the form of facial expressions and hand and body movements as important element of the art form. The use of voice modulation has also been acknowledged. Lele Gomba has mastered all of these. His body and voice have been honed into finely tuned instruments whose flexibility enables him to produce a wide range of notes. ... His portrayal of character is thus extremely convincing on both visual and aural levels...(pp. 108).

Sigana weaves together many things, including the songs that are not just for accompaniment per se, but also as vessels that further develop the plot of the story. Role play is also an integral part of this mixture, thus making it a kind of highly bastardized form, which may not find a relevant space in the Western oriented classification categories. It is on this basis that sigana and other related art forms must work hard, for the current state of affairs does not promote a return to self. That is why today even the Kenyans who are familiar with the struggle for independence will be heard cheering the caricature of songs that the modern Kenyan should be singing with supplication. An example is the Gikuyu song that has got the allegory of the tree that our father planted for us:

Muti uyu mukuona	This tree which you see
Twahandiiruo ni awa	Was planted by our father
Na tutiamenyaga ati uri murio	And we didn't know it is as sweet
Ta uki wa njuki....	As honey

Ngiri ikuaragira	The warthog does
Gitinaini kiagwo	On its foot
Niguo ciana ciake	So that its babies
Ciriage maciaro.	Can eat its fruit.

This song is victim to a lot of slaughter by many *mugithi* one man guitarists, with accomplices in their patrons, who shout in mad ululation to punctuate the *muti*, and the truncation *giti* from *gitina*, so as to come up with a vulgar formation; the one implied in *muti* having already bounced home. This emanates from the very colonization, which we did not totally banish from our land, as attested by Ngugi, a state which regards independence with contempt, because it has not changed their state much. Their art forms and other ways of expression are already forbidden, like madness in Plato's

Republic. It is a cry for a space to perform that which is real, not that which celebrates the unreal. The Kamiriithus Cultural Centre 1970s ought to find its way back, with the common people taking the responsibility of defining their own theatre, which will in turn define space and its appropriation, and finally determine ownership of the proceeds from the productive use of this space. This effort should also permeate the realm of writing for the theatre. When we write plays, are they in tandem with the needs of our own theatre tradition?

Ulli Beier, writing in the introduction to *The Imprisonment of Obatala and Other Plays*, says that it was not easy to write down the plays that have been published in this collection of three plays. This is because of the dependence of African theatre, upon the performance rather than the text. Reading through the plays, one finds wide latitude in terms of the stage, when it comes to the definition of the stage and what it can achieve. There are other people who have written Western styled plays, but with a tinge of African theatre. An example is Mugyabuso Mulokozi, writer of *Mukwava wa Uhehe*, which we are told, is a play that went through several re-writes so as to incorporate some aspects of African theatre, in a move away from strict Western theatre. Most instructive is the direction lines (pp22) where he says that everybody stands up; including members of the audience, when King Mukwava enters. This is a major departure from the usual practice, which divides the two lots of audience and performer, with a special schism. Sigana claims this space, but it is yet to gain space, as a member of the performing arts fraternity in a post colony.

To be a truly Kenyan art form, sigana must fight a lot of vicious wars, for space.

Notes

¹ Maragoli is one of the Luhya communities of Western Kenya.

² Margaretta wa Gacheru The *Daily Nation*, Tuesday Nov.20, 1996.

³ Bukusu is one of the Luhya communities of Western Kenya

⁴ Mende name for this style of storytelling (Harding 2002)

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CHAPTER FOUR

Fabricating Nationhood: *Sigana* (Narrative) as Theatre in Post-colonial Kenya

George Odera Outa

Introduction

...sometimes national cultures are tempted to turn the clock back, to retreat defensively to that lost time when the nation was 'great', and to restore past identities. This is the regressive, the anachronistic element in the national cultural story. But often this very return to the past conceals a struggle to mobilize 'the people' to purify their ranks, to expel the 'others' who threaten their identity and to gird their loins for a new march forwards...(Stuart Hall 1992:295. Emphasis added)

This chapter examines how popular theatre initiatives fabricate alternative nationhoods within the prevailing morass of a post-colonial polity. Whether it is in the representation of historical figures or the attempt at reconstructing new meanings from ancient mythologies; or whether it is in the re-enactment of the quandaries currently imposed by the AIDS pandemic; or the call to promulgate environmental wisdom using theatre, the fact is that the 1990s did emerge with significantly new theatre forms and strategies in Kenya. *Sigana* (or narrative) theatre in particular, is arguably, the single-most important novelty in Kenya's theatre since the 1970s days and the Kamiriithu Theatre experiment.

How has the strategy of "narrative" been re-deployed in the "modernist" context as to result in what is widely acknowledged as the arrival of "a truly Kenyan form?" How do such performances enjoin in the "power debate", and in so doing accentuating a longing for lost nationalisms in the post-colony's unending quest for some kind of alternative nationhood? We seek to respond to some of these questions. But this essay is also an extended analysis of one particular intervention: '*Drumbeats of Kirinyaga*', an original performance first staged sometime in 1993 and which had its own remarkable share of trouble with post-colonial Kenya's fairly well known discomfitures with whatever it perceived as

“dissident” drama (see Outa 1999; 1997; 1995). The *Drumbeats* script demonstrates how the complexities of power are re-enacted and represented through ‘*Sigana*’ and how these accentuate a longing for lost nationalisms almost in Hall’s (1992) sense. It would seem that it was in the course of ‘workshopping’ to produce plays that were immediately relevant to the urban Nairobi audiences that some newer theatre makers in Kenya, and principally Oby Obyerodhiambo, discovered the immense potential that lay untapped in the form of old legends and other age-old ethnic narratives. It is this that explains the artistic spirit behind at least three important initiatives: ‘*La Femme Fatale*’; (1991) ‘*Drumbeats of Kirinyaga*’ (1993) and *Kit Mikayi* (undated). Later the strategy has been deployed with remarkable originality and success in ‘*Mfungwa Tuliyeisahau*’ (‘The prisoner Whom We Forgot’) and *Jomo’s Tero Buru* (‘Jomo’s Funeral Memorial’) first performed at the close of 1999.¹

The narrative is conventionally a genre that presupposes listening rather than performance. It presupposes a fairly passive audience that would - in the *Luo* cultural context - listen to tales told in a grandmother’s hut just ahead of retiring to sleep.² This essay is about how such narratives have been re-deployed in a more modernist context as to result in what audiences, and a cross section of media reviewers acknowledged as the arrival of ‘a truly Kenyan form’, a notion whose significance is equally interesting.

Theoretically, this essay is largely informed by Achille Mbembe’s (1992) contention that power performance in the post-colony is most comprehensively understood outside the single-binary framework that has so far been most preponderant. *Drumbeats...* script demonstrates how the more complex ambivalences of power are re-enacted and represented through *sigana*. In the Kenyan experience it is this that accentuates a longing for lost nationalisms.

Two statements herebelow underlie the historic significance of the “arrival” of *Sigana* in the Kenyan theatre scene, sometime in the mid 1990s:

“.. what made the ‘shutdown’ so difficult to do—apart from people being so thoroughly entertained by comics, storytellers and songster-poets the entire afternoon—was the pulsating presence of that percussive quintet called “Talking Drums of Africa” who not only accompanied Oby Obyerodhiambo’s energetic performance of **Canoe Races**, but also managed

to mesmerise the crowd so smartly that many were moved to join their drum-talking' dance.

.. the oral performer has not only to captivate his audience with the quality of his or her poise, poetic eloquence, charm, wit and grace, even as he succeeds in weaving a magic web of imagery around his audience heart and head. He or she has got to tell stories that relate to people's imagination and experience, whether using folklore (like Aghan, Oby or Erastus Owuor), or street talk (like Bobby Buluma and Richard Mwendwa) or a combination of both (as Zein did).. which of course is why so much of the oral performance that we saw on saturday seemed to confirm that there is a genuine groundswell of growing interest in **a new style of indigenous theatre artistry, one which we can say with confidence, that it's truly Kenyan...** (*Margaretta wa Gacheru* [Nov.1996. Emphasis added])

These, fairly self-explanatory adulations underlie the general consensus among watchers of the Kenya theatre scene in the 1990s, who were of the unequivocal judgement that a significantly new form of theatre expression had dawned.

'Oby': A Note on Background Formation

Oby Obyerodhiambo is a product of Seme location, Kisumu District of Kenya. He had early education at Our Lady of Mercy Primary School in Nairobi where he grew up, a child of a veteran of the Posts and Telecommunications Corporation. Later he went to Kapsoi Primary School, Eldoret, where his father 'fostered' him to an uncle then teaching there. The idea was to have the rather 'playful' Oby move out of the 'time-wasting' city life and have the child concentrate on his studies so that he could make a better grade at the Certificate of Primary Examinations (CPE). Eldoret, however, became only a brief sojourn, for just one year later, Oby was back in Nairobi for secondary school education. He went to Jamhuri and then Kerugoya High in the Central Province of Kenya for the advanced level schooling and in 1983 was admitted for a Bachelor of Education (BED) course at the Kenyatta University. In joining in 1983, Oby like all his contemporaries of that time, were nearly two years late because of the protracted closure by the Government of Kenya of the only two universities then (Nairobi and Kenyatta), following an abortive coup against the Moi government in 1982. Oby graduated from Kenyatta as a teacher specialising in the teaching of English Language and Literature. He then taught at a

few schools in Western Kenya before returning yet again to the city, this time for a Master's Degree course at the University of Nairobi. The Master's thesis on "Symbolism in the Drama of John Ruganda" was submitted, and accepted by the University in 1990. It was while enrolled for the Master's Degree programme that Oby teamed up with Opiyo Mumma who had already founded a teaming Theatre Workshop (TW) group. Mumma and Gacugu Makini were in fact Oby's supervisors for his thesis, but they were also actively involved as theatre makers in their own right; producing and acting in their own productions. Oby later became one of the kingpins of TW, served a long term as chairman before later relinquishing the post as the group also became more and more embroiled in fairly familiar organisational politics. In terms of a driving force, this is what Oby has had to say of his peculiar decision to resign from a University teaching career, and later from a better paying corporate media firm:

I wanted to say this is what I want to be as opposed to what you imagine I am...*Defining yourself as opposed to being defined by another.* We have to define ourselves and say: this is who we are! (*The Standard*, Nov 14, 1999. *Emphasis, mine*)

'Workshopping' with Sigana and Beyond, (1990+)

The workshop experience for Oby and his group begins with one little experiment that the group chanced on after the frustration following the banning of their full length production of Italian writer Dario Fo's *Can't pay, Won't pay*. The play had allegedly been declared banned, because as Oby put in an interview, "the message was too close to the situation in Kenya. Workers were unable to buy anything because of the very low wages," (Personal communication).

In their naiveté so to speak, Oby and group imagined that they were better off creating a "truly Kenyan drama" so that they need not be accused of the usual tag of "foreign ideas brought to destroy the country"³. The discussion and experiments that followed led to the birth of a piece of drama that has since attracted fair amount of critical attention and which I refer to in due course. The drama was to be called *Drumbeats of Kirinyaga*, which was at once unique, if only because of the fact that it did not emanate from the convention of an existing script. This, in fact became an important feature of the workshopping technique: working from ideas and concepts;

brain storming as a cast, rather than the peculiarly western mode of writing an individual script before selecting the team of actors. Needless to say, such group authorship had even, for this production, considerable problematics once it became successful. Oby agrees indeed, that many TW members put in their ideas, but:

In the evening it was me who sat down and tried to turn some of these ideas into a coherent form of drama. I wrote it out and brought it the following day to rehearsal where they were tried out and probably changed a dozen times...and I still went and wrote those changes and that is what we have as a script today (Personal communication).

The problematic of 'group authorship' aside, it would seem plausible to state that there is perhaps no other Kenyan thespian in the 1990s decade that individually or in league with others, achieved as much in terms of 'original' or freshly inventive theatre performances. Yet the issue to be explored here is not so much about the sheer quantity of the output in itself a testimony of commitment. Rather, the purpose is in part aimed at establishing this large statement on and about theatre diversity; ingenious and indigenous experimentation resulting in a rather successful attempt at inventing what the critics eventually acknowledged as being, "truly Kenyan". Implicit in this acknowledgement was clearly, a recognition of at least two elements that could be seen as uniquely Kenyan or African. First was the practice of relying almost *in toto*, on a storyline informed and inspired by an exclusively indigenous material content. It was a bold recourse to try and privilege an art form that the long history of colonialism and western education had virtually erased, but as the *sigana* artists themselves acknowledged, without success:

The African cosmology gets outward expression through oral folklore, which interprets the immediate space, as well as the realms of the beyond. This spiced nourishment of values, enjoyment and creativity, has defied destruction over the years, always rising up as a transcending vehicle across generations; transferring values and even critically modifying them into cultural ideals of societal aspirations. It is this indestructible nature of folklore from the equally indestructible cooking "*pots of rocks*" which has inspired us to welcome our audience to an evening of god story telling. (Programme booklet, 1995:4)

This candid attempt to specify the unique attribute of 'Africanness' during the *Nyungu ya Mawe*⁴ series of performances was indeed, to a large extent what critics were qualifying as being *truly* Kenyan. Indeed the players also went ahead to pinpoint the centrality of a versatile orality, in this whole process:

.. This title, [*Nyungu ya Mawe*], attributed to this set of three folk tales asserts the indomitable nature of oral traditions which has over centuries moulded the souls of the Africans wherever they are across the world. (Programme booklet, 1995:3)

They cup it all by observing that that the *trio* that formed the *sigana* show on this occasion (*Brothers at War*, *The Eagle* and *Kit Mikayi*), "are narrated, danced and chanted within a vibrant African theatrical framework."

Thus, even without going into some of the contestations that surround such usages as, "Africanness", "African framework", or the "African cosmology", it would be clear that the *Sigana* performances were in so many ways, seen by their makers as some kind of a return to the more authentic "traditional roots", and if indeed one can argue that they were quite substantially drawn from the *Luo* cultural landscape, to that extent too, they could legitimately claim a stake in the larger imaginary called Kenya.

But beyond the foregoing, it was also clearly being acknowledged, that the theatre strategies that *Sigana* was deploying- literal story telling, the extensive reliance on drum, dance, song, chant, dance accompaniments and an invocation of audience participation- were clearly a far remove from conventional Western concepts of theatre that have been extensively imported into post-colonial situations of theatre practice. This is how Peter Kimani - a theatre reviewer- captured the development of story telling into a culture of performance as theatre in Kenya:

The challenge of story telling is that, unlike a straight play in which one has a script and defined movements, story telling is amorphous and requires more than just a mastery of the story, (usually not in the written form), and has to be fluid enough to accommodate divergent lines that the audience might throw in. And one has to sing and do a jig, a characteristic often used to break the monotony of a story, or set the proper mood for subsequent acts. (Kimani: January 21, Nairobi: *The East African Standard*).

It is to say that such theatre norms that have been typified by the raised proscenium stage; the passive, non-participating audience; the select array of cast; the written script, as some of its most definitive features, are elements of practice that *Sigana*, throughout its life, sort to emphatically move away from. Quite poignantly too, *Sigana* has to the time of this writing, sort to move away from conventional theatre houses, which are no longer perceived as a vital ingredient for their realisation. Such liberation of the Kenyan theatre space; what Opiyo Mumma has called, the “conquest of the theatre space” leading towards its “authenticity” (Mumma 1999:33-34), is also defined by the flexible and adaptive ability that enables artistes to play and perform in all manner of varied places.

Prefacing Drumbeats...

As a script *Drumbeats* is built around real histories as well as some ancient mythologies found across the amalgam of Kenya’s ethnic nations. It weaves in characters from all over the country through their important linguistic, and other cultural sigma right from the start. The *Nyatiti*, the *Litungu* and the *Obokhano* that form part of the opening set are traditional musical instruments from three Kenyan ethnic communities: the Luo, Luhya and Kisii. At this stage too, the choice of names of characters are immediately significant: It is clearly an attempt to infuse meaning into names; some kind of “onomastics” that suggest important social constructions of meaning and therefore, carrying some of the drama’s important purpose. Thus, *Mwakazi* is meant to convey the idea of hardworking; *Wakarimu* for generosity; *Mchekei* for her convivial joviality, etc, with the point being established right from the beginning that Kenya is a nation that is diverse alright, but at the same time whose potency for unity cannot be ignored or underestimated, thus, “so different, yet from one seed”, (DOK, 3).

This opening can in fact, also be analysed somewhat differently. It is clearly an attempt by a concerned Kenyan playwright who is operating in the dusk of the 1990s, to figure out a new nation. In the written script for instance, a stage direction calls attention to, “.. a single string violin (*orutu, ishiriri*)” which we are told, “completes the unifying rhythm of harmony”(DOK 1). In fact, as the drama unfolds to its momentous crescendo, we realise that virtually all the Kenyan communities have been by and by, brought on board to constitute one of the most powerful stage

statements in recent times, to *re-construct* what for all practical purposes can be conceptualised as Kenya's shattered nationhood.

The first point of note in *Drumbeats* is therefore its attempt at an intervention that sees strength in disparity; that articulates or constructs some sort of possible tribal homogeneities in spite of stark differences that have been engendered both socially and politically. To this end the play was performing a major statement of, and about power. It was creating or inventing the myth of collective national unity and strength in a post-colonial polity in which despair and ethnic differentiation had become the order of the day. In my judgement, *the super-objective* of this particular 'sigana play' was to fabricate a near mythical-fantasy of a cohesive and united Kenyan nation, and in so doing effectively undermine some of the divisive political rhetoric of the time. One strategy deployed to realise this Herculean mission is by drawing, almost incessantly, from ancient resources of folklore and narrative; music, dance, a variety of distinct ethnic cultural practices, and by deploying all these to make clever allusions to common frameworks of knowledge and experiences in the history in Kenya.

The names such as, "rat"; (literally meaning unity), *kondiegi* (the place of hyenas) who turn out to be ogres in the dramatic *sigana* (narrative) of *Opien wuod Abonyo*, emerge completely pregnant with meaning. So too, is the notion of *Kirinyaga* as used in the title. 'Kirinyaga' is the first loud signal that the performance is reverting to a much mythicised past in Kenya's history; a past which we soon realise is partly embedded in the *Agikuyu* ethnic history and mythology, as well as the role such conception continues to play in the national psyche.

By using 'Kirinyaga' in the title to the play Oby and his group were also deliberately, (in my view), seeking to test the extent to which political agitation for democratic pluralism could be said to have gained root in Kenya at that time. They were in other words, *performing power* to see if it could match the entrenched perceptions of such clear, if not controversial ethnic sigmas in Moi's Kenya, in particular. In 1993 such a title was bound to raise eyebrows with the political establishment, chief of which is the implicit challenge to the very notion of Kenya as set up and founded through the colonial legacy. It is also obvious that the makers of this play knew or were aware of this, but as I elaborate later, it was necessary for

them to insist on, and constantly harp on the innocence of the play as one way of making political power look so deft as to feel threatened by mere plays.

One way in which artists have thus stage-managed their power in Kenya and thereby writing themselves into fame, is to precisely position themselves as some kind of unofficial oppositional voices, and then insist on the innocence of their works. The attempt to stage plays without licence so that government agents- the police in particular- could ransack the theatre and stop the production is both a contestation against the excesses of power as well as an attempt to establish alternative power bases. This in a sense is akin to the Foucaultian notion of “capillarial” power: power, which as he has averred, does not reside in one place but “ instead always at issue in ongoing attempts to (re) produce effective social alignments, and conversely to avoid or erode their effects, often by producing various counter-alignments, (Foucault 1994: 109-110). My overriding argument is thus plainly that it is time to say that nearly all these plays, (and precisely by their very content), could not have been innocent.

The Storyline of Drumbeats...

By popular accounts Kirinyaga is supposed to be the traditional Gikuyu reference to the tallest mountain in the country from which the very country bears its name. Some oral accounts claim that the early European colonialists could not pronounce the name Kirinyaga and so concocted “Kenya” as an alternative. The story line of *Drumbeats* was in part inspired by the ancient histories and myths about the *Agikuyu* national origin in which the God (*Ngai*) is supposed to have given the land (Kenya) to his children Gikuyu and Mumbi, and their nine children, who we are told, represent the main Agikuyu clans to-date. Of course such mythology according to one eminent Gikuyu historian, “are practically worthless” (Muriuki, 1974:i). The point though, is that these mythologies of ethnic origin are not as worthless as Muriuki’s assertion might imply. Rather, they become crucial referents when ethnic assertions are brought into question. Indeed, it is this latent belief in ethnic mythology that becomes crucial material for re-inventing the post 1990s nationalism in Kenya, and precisely the new demands for a stake in the arrangements for political power. The question then, which Muriuki misses, is not so much

whether myths are true or not, but rather the purpose that they serve; their role to quote Barthes, as “depoliticised speech,” so that they give “an historical intention, a natural justification and making contingency appear eternal...” (Barthes, 1957; 1993 reprint: 142).

Drumbeats was thus clearly and provocatively so, conceived to suggest some kind of a re-invention of popular *Agikuyu* nationalism. This is something that Oby and group knew was capable of causing Moi and his government a lot of anxiety, if only because the *Agikuyu* represented the one ethnic hegemony that his over two decade rule had tried to completely dismember. On this, the Gikuyu were now in the familiar terrain that by popular acknowledgment, had been reserved for the Luos⁵. What should have been as interesting to the secret police that interrogated Oby about *Drumbeats* was thus, why him (a presumed Luo) should have allowed himself to be “used “ by the “stubborn” *Agikuyu*. This is to say that the state itself was nursing a predominant and near mythological anxiety; that having successfully survived on the rhetoric of ethnicity while effectively encouraging it, a Luo should not have been the one to articulate what seemed like an exclusively *Agikuyu* misery. Oby was thus behaving like “a bad Luo”; an ungrateful Luo, to use one of the state (Moi’s) tactics, in the sub-text which also chose to make capital about an ever simmering *Agikuyu-Luo* political rivalry.

What then must be born in mind is that, beyond merely using the Gikuyu-Mumbi mythology as a narratological entry point, *Drumbeats* itself is not exactly a re-invigoration of some kind of *Agikuyu* popular nationalism even if the script bore its main sigma. For Oby it has been explained in these terms:

The idea was to see God as the ultimate Being that serves man, yet not, hence the notion of *Wasayengai* in the play. *Wasayengai* was to our mind a departure from the original *Agikuyu* mythology and by itself a collapsed version of Kenya’s 42 communities moulded by one omnipresent creator referred to as Tshitabwa in the play... this version was produced and developed in workshop situation.

In other words, Oby and company were on a deliberate project of fabricating; inventing an alternative Kenyan nation. Ironically, this seems to have been what sat rather uneasily against the counter discourses that

had been emanating from the state. It was, a rather potent indication of the hypocritical terrain on which the modern Kenya/African state is founded; pretending in endless rhetoric to vouch for a unified nation but which in practical terms is something it does not believe in or care about.

Drumbeats thus picks from this revisioning of myth and proceeds to invent a drama built a round the strengths and foibles of the entire Kenyan nation. Its main idea, is to engage with the possibility of a 'unified' nation-state; a nation beyond the various ethnicities; a nation that can provide resources and strength; the wherewithal with which to overcome both the apparent local tyranny and the imperial international enslavement represented in IMF and World Bank, as well as the Euro-American and Japanese agencies that are introduced towards the end of the play. In Oby's words, the reality of *Drumbeats* has remained in the fact that even with the advent of multi-party politics in the 1990s, the country was never-ever cohesive, and probably would never be. This view is perhaps in opposition to what Gichingiri Ndigirigi makes of the play, especially his suggestion that the play does, in fact, prove the political cohesiveness of the Kenyan nation, which the Moi regime stubbornly denied, (Ndigirigi, 1999:77-78). This rather optimistic reading is of course based on Ndigirigi's own ideological inclination (and possibly his ethnic background), but more so, the fact that he succumbs easily to the penchant for "resolution" as a preferred orthodoxy in literary response.

The fact, to my mind, is simply that the material circumstances of the Kenyan nation in the 1990s refused to succumb to any imposable ideological and intellectual optimism that had, perhaps, been conceived at the beginning of the 'workshopping' for this play. Instead, the play managed to confirm important complexities and ambivalences that of necessity inspire the post-colonial state; the petty and sometimes intractable sources of differences, (for instance who fought most for independence, represented in the hippo meat they have killed together); to which Ramogi (a symbolizing character in the play) hilariously answers, "the killer blow was mine." (DOK: 42). Needless to emphasise, *Drumbeats* ends up articulating the ever-abiding tension between the desire for nationhood (however understood), and its apparent impossibility in the face of such post-modern fragmentation.

‘Performing Power’ in Drumbeats

One anchoring motif in *Drumbeats* is derived from a Luo stock: “*Sigand Opien wuod Abonyo*”, (the narrative of one *Opien*, the son of *Abonyo*), a supposedly old narrative that the community of actors has had for along time, but could still have no qualms hearing it again. Since they all know it somehow, they can help in the process of its narration. In theatrical terms, this is the perfect excuse for converting a purely narrative genre to an engaging dramatic performance, the excuse being that “since we all know the story we shall tell it all together.” (DOK: 5) The first point in ‘theatrealising’ *Sigana*, is thus to find ways and means in which it can be enacted without making it look like any other ordinary story telling session.

What becomes immediately clear is that the storyline is *impelled* by the play’s makers, as to involve contemporary and meaningful allusions that enable traditional locality. Like ordinary advertisement, it freely borrows and appropriates from existing frameworks of knowledge and employs an intertextuality that communicates with the envisaged audience. In essence it is the narrative of this man who in the midst of a raving famine is led to a secret location by his wife to the place where the “*kondiegi*” people (‘the Hyena people’) have stored much more than they need. *Opien* is caught by the ‘*ondiegi*’ when in a fit of greed he refuses to run away before the owners wake up. Such proverbial even fatal greed, is captured in these graphic terms:

.. Let me eat one cob to get strength to get the sack off my back; let me eat another to get strength to put it down, and another to open the mouth, and another to put in a cob, and another to put in another cob, and another and another, another...(DOK, 8).

The language here captures the effort to simulate the diction and tenure of some ordinary conversation. It is this insatiability of *Opien* that leads to the subsequent encounter with the ogres and at once a dramatic framing of the well-known menaces of post-colonial greed, national plunder and endemic corruption. In other words, at another level the narrative is about the evolution of the cult of political greed, and what we see is a performance of power at two possible levels. The one is between the people and their rulers, (the ogres in the narrative, Vs *Opien wuod Abonyo*’s family), and at the other, is the capturing of the whole notion of the “people” through their folly and how they are progressively implicated in their own tragedy.

What we see in fits of dramatic action and humour is just how Opien moves from the innocence of deprivation and poverty, but when exposed to the opportunity to have something, he does it to excess proportions, including being tempted to steal the whole lot of it for purposes of his own primitive accumulation. To be sure, this is what Mbembe diagnoses as the particular penchant for reproducing or mimicking power in all the minor circumstances of daily life (Mbembe 1992:25). This kind of depiction, one must stress is something remarkably new in Kenyan theatre generally. In particular it is starkly different from other theatre in which we almost always, expect “the people” to be the perennial victims of acts of power even without interrogating their own agency in the very process of subjection.

One notices too that the language employed is meant to capture both “the grotesque and the obscene” made famous in Bakhtin’s analyses and have become hallmarks of the postcolonial subject and ruler. The signposts for ‘Kenyanising’, are of course many and are strategically posted all over. The first is when ‘Rat’ reprimands Apiyo: “You like screaming you are the greatest superior to all other animals...in all these years what have you done for yourself”. Perhaps this is the most quoted statement in Kenya’s colonial history and directly alluding to Jomo Kenyatta telling nationalist politician, Bildad Kaggia that he had no reason to be poor at independence. It is the precise statement capturing that point in time when post-colonial Kenya clearly began to lose direction, or in Francois Bayart’s (1993), remarkable phrase, “the politics of the belly” setting in.

A few moments later we have Rat at it again: “Since when did a blind person lead others,” and the audience promptly realises that Rat is none other than Moi and the reprimand a thinly disguised reminder of what Moi told old man Odinga when the latter ‘resurfaced’ to lead the multiparty onslaught in the nineties. A few pages later is yet another familiar sign post: The chief ogre (read, president of country) refers to the smell of a *kinyangarika*, (DOK, 9) a word coined by Kenyan politicians to refer disparagingly to their nemeses and the fact that at this point, the narrative personae, (Opien) is interfering with their “*matunda ya uhuru*” (the proverbial fruits of independence) that have become as known in local parlance, to near zombification levels.

Before long, the chief ogre declares, "I know everything that goes on everywhere, even under people's beds," (DOK, 11). These, to be sure, have been near classical lines when the leadership seeks to intimidate the populace. It is in part a reference to the mind-boggling network of informers and spies planted at every conceivable place under the guise of state security and whose job for the post-colonial state, is to report and track down real and imagined dissidents. Such lines caused reverberations of laughter due to the audience's familiarity with such 'Kenyanising discourses'. But the fact is also that they accomplish the ruler's own 'fetishisation' of himself, especially the claims of possessing the truth and being omnipresent (Mbembe 1992:10-11; 19).

An equally interesting one is the signifier "*uhuru na kazi*", ('freedom and work'), (DOK: 29) which was independent Kenya's first really mobilising slogan and so popularised in the early years of the Kenyatta regime. Here it is used to realise and ridicule; the idea that 'freedom and work' as a national rallying slogan was actually meant for others to believe in ('the people') and not for members of the ruling establishment who had fast become power unto themselves.

The play takes the leverage through Tshitabwa, to question for the first time, some of these slogans and their quiet disappearance from the popular national parlance. Elsewhere, the classical response to the poor and the deprived is for instance the fact that "you don't work hard enough" (DOK: 10). On the other hand, the Ogres try to perpetuate some of the tired mythologies about their own philanthropic largesse as leaders; for instance, the chief ogre's proclamations about his love for children. This claim has reached such ridiculous proportions that it is the object of common mimicry. It is this ironic love that has even spared Opien from the sure venom of the ogre. The play keeps harping on this strange love for children before suddenly and cleverly converting it to the doublespeak: "I also now declare that I also love women" (DOK: 11). It is the beginning of the foray into fun and humour with the 'commandments own symbols and orifices as a way of confronting it with its own vulgarity (Mbembe 1992:8-9).

The stories about the politicians preference for such lecherous lives have never ceased with the actual prospect of preferring, as it were, to "eat other peoples wives"; because "your wife was tastier than the

children..."(DOK: 11) It is, at once too, a carnivalesque into power's insatiable greed and its more obscene and violent forms of vengeance. To use Foucault's terms, the play seems to set the limits and forms of the sayable, for as it is, such leeway would not be available outside the theatrical framework. (Foucault, 1991:50-75).

At this point of the drama, *Opien's* wife refuses to be a subservient victim, and it should indeed be repeated from the point of view being advanced here that not even women in the most repressive post-colonial regimes are ever mutely subservient. Power is often challenged ridiculed and often its draconian elements easily appropriated even at moments when it thinks itself infallible. This, for instance, is the reason Apiyo has the tenacity to remind the chief ogre, that the grains in their (ogres') possession, are after all not their own. She actually teases them about their alleged hard work, declaring to their face: "You have grain but where are your farms? You have ghee milk and meat, but where are your flocks and herds?" (DOK 10).

The rest of the performance relies on Apiyo's wit and courage to demonstrate how victims also have power. This is what they use in efforts at extending their survival or at liberating themselves altogether, from the claws of the post-colonial dictator. Indeed, even if it is only the dramatic space that allows her 'the voice' to speak, it is in a significant (oft-forgotten way) that her real power is also masked, albeit beneath the dramatic illusion. Apiyo's wisdom here, to be sure, is strategically not of the "leg", or more appropriately, "bottom power" referred to, in Ngugi⁶. Rather, she builds it around sheer common sense, for after all, the ogres are reputedly and notoriously *acommonsensical*. There is perhaps nothing else as easy as fooling them into eating dogs! But in stretching their greed to such disproportionate extremes, we do realise too, that we are not only once again engaged with the now familiar "belly" politics, but also, that the very leaders undermine their own power through such depravities.

The 'Song and Dance' of Drumbeats...

In presenting or narrating the rest of "the struggle", *Drumbeats* relies extensively on songs drawn from the entire Kenyan landscape, as well as what I prefer to call the "roll-call" technique as a means of rallying the disparate Kenyan ethnicities.⁷ The songs that mobilise all Kenyan ethnicities

represent the most singular achievement for this script. Popular Kenyan musical classics have their tunes re-deployed in the service of a theatrical construction of reality. A good example is how the tune “*Njiwa*” (literally meaning, ‘dove’) is deployed to comment on the notorious regiment of Kenya’s tribal clashes of the 1990s:

.... *Njiwa wangu ruka vyema hadi Embayii..* [My dove, fly well up to Embayi..]

Njiwa wangu ruka vyema hadi Makayani [My dove, fly well up to Makayani]

Njiwa wangu ruka vyema hadi kule Mukuruwe wa Gathanga [my bird fly well up to there Mukurwe wa Gathanga]

Njiwa wangu ruka vyema hadi Laikipia [my dove fly well up to Laikipia]

Njiwa wangu ruka vyema hadi kule Kibigori... [my dove fly well up to Kibigori]

This, in fact, is an instance of the re-deployment of a popular ‘*taarab*’ tune to make subtle references to the sites of tribal violence that were rocking Kenya during this period, and which many believed were instigated by the political Mafia of the day. In terms of theatrical strategy, what is striking is how the playwrights here revert to a fairly ancient technique in which narratives on the whole, tend to enjoy some kind of interplay between fantasy and reality, (Okpewho, 1973); or as already established in the plays of Imbuga, some kind of “distancing of context” (Ruganda, 1994), as a way of commenting on “home truths”. Thus, in this song what happens is the free flowing intertextuality with several other seemingly “irrelevant” places and names, so as to sneak in the more contentious ones such as Kibigori and Laikipia⁸. Mukurwe wa Gathanga is in counter, the place where the mythical *Agikuyu* founder (Gikuyu and Mumbi) is believed to have retreated to after completing their ordained earthly functions. It is the dramatic rediscovery of what is often expunged from official discourse; a refiguring of suppressed knowledge (Hall, 1995; Njogu, 1999), and presenting the possibility that Kenyan ethnic communities can actually unite into an important strategic whole.

This particular mission is of course best accomplished through the prolonged “roll call” of the diverse ethnic communities already referred and which is sung to the popular refrain: *Wayie*, (literally meaning, we agree/concur) and invoking even the most politically unknown ethnic constituencies such as the Rendile and the Pokomo:

Boni uyie: wayie; (The Boni do you agree? We agree)

Rendille uyie: wayie (The Rendile do you agree: We agree)... (DoK: 15)

There is a need to note here that this terribly influential song was often used in opposition campaign meetings in 1992 at the height of FORD, the political party that mushroomed out of the clamour for a return to a multi-party politics, in effect making FORD pose the single-biggest threat to Moi's regime, before it caved in: thanks to the intractable morass of tribalism. The bitter failure by FORD is well captured in *Drumbeats*, and must be used to emphasise my earlier contention that the play was actually a statement on the incohesiveness rather than the cohesiveness of the Kenyan society. The song was literally asking each ethnic group if they concurred; that is agreeing to the all vital questions especially removing Moi from power and uniting Kenya into a new and powerful nation; something that proved as elusive as the wind, when subjected to the core realities of ethnic difference.

'Drum beats' for a New Nation: the fruits of a 'Workshop' play:

As the play develops into a rising action, an authorial intrusion camouflaged in the voice of the mythical Tshitabwa, (the moulder God) tells the audience:

The sound of the drumbeats welcome a new generation, those who shall be co-protectors of the shrine...the drumbeats usher in shutters to keep secure from the marauding predators and selfish intruders. The drumbeats herald the dawn of a new dawn of unity, togetherness, caring love generosity, honesty and tolerance. The drum plays the new beat for a future as our fathers decreed for us...Let us listen to the message of the drum...(Drumbeats on *Kirinyaga*, original: 23)

It is at that high point that we are led to this moment of symbolic rebirth. The daughters of the mythical Waseyengai now in need of men who will be "co-protectors" have their dreams answered in the form of a momentous birth of young men for each one of them. It is a moment highly reminiscent of the opening scene in Francis Imbuga's *Man of Kafira* depicting the African men who do not die even after being brutally killed (Imbuga 1984; reprint 194:6), for they are reborn only a few minutes later. This momentous "[re]birth" in *Drumbeats* was probably the play's high noon for at least two reasons. First, it continues to capture the interplay between pure

fantasy and reality, or myth and reality in the African universe, which some Western critics often fail to understand especially when deployed into literature⁹.

But the important point here is that the play is gesturing towards the possible [re]birth of a new generation of Kenyans at a key moment in the national history. FORD is rallying everyone at the national front and it is time to abandon shallow ethnic bigotries that have been used and exploited to keep 'the nation' a part. These new-borns, unlike their parents, have an admirable pan-Kenyan scope in their thinking and outlook, while patriotism is their sworn ideology. Indeed, they are to be distinct and a part from the marauding predators that have so far characterised the Kenyan nationhood. Further, the different members of the diverse Kenyan ethnic communities speak and understand each other's languages. Waseyengai actually leads in his ability to switch codes and speak *dhooluo*; Tshitabwa can speak *Gikuyu*, *Maasai*, *Ki-Luhya*, etc. etc. And if this is not enough, the symbolic marriages are themselves highly cross-cultural in a dramatic inventive yet to be seen in the country in any real terms. Before he departs Tshitabwa also signals to some kind of oath-taking at which these new generation of Kenyans are implored: "jealously guard your freedom, never accept fetters on to your being" (DOK: 31).

To be sure this scenario is in sharp contrast with the infamous 1969 oaths allegedly taken by the Agikuyu as an independent ethnic enclave, allegedly to ensure that political power did not leave the mythical "house of Mumbi"; what Ngugi hilariously baptises as "tea party"¹⁰. But this incident can also be read as an attempt to mobilise the power of the peasantry in that familiar uni-linear fashion; a project carried to a crescendo subsequently, that typically distinguishes the oppressor forces from those of the oppressed. It is in fact a theatrical project to unite the hitherto extremely disparate communities: Gikuyu; Luo, Kalenjin; Luhya and all the others brought together by a common vision of struggle, cemented in a marriage that is, (of course and unfortunately) only hatched up in the fertile theatrical minds. It is in every way reminiscent to what Ayi Kwei Armah (1975) envisages at the end of his remarkable novel, *The Healers*;¹¹ or De Graft's children of *Muntu* in the play by that same title. Like in both cases, this is too good to be true, and indeed Tshitabwa forewarns before he leaves:

Beware of the luring traps of the ogres,
the monsters who'd lay to waste your efforts,

Like the sun that sets to rise again, I recede to my abode... (DOK, 36)

This dream of unity is fortified by a conscious appeal to the known traditional strengths of these various communities; for instance the ordinarily denigrated Maasais-'backward', so it is assumed-are now hailed because of their unrivalled knowledge of life, "in harmony and respect of nature... the beasts of the wild do not prey on their own kind, a lesson we must learn..."(DOK, 34).

Well, disunity finally sets in, and when it does, it begins as already intimated, with absolute pettiness. The shrine is not just abandoned but desecrated upon, to "shrine mar *chietha*, (A shrine of shit); public property gradually becomes "public mar *chietha*). What we are once again in the classical post-colony and its semiotics of shit. The whole country, if one likes, has been reduced to "shitland"(Ngugi), in a manner that conforms to the discursive authority already established by several other distinguished African writers¹².

The high profiled grabbing of Kenya's *Uhuru* Park by "politically correct" politicians is 'inter-textualised" in this regard. Later in Kenya a similar grabbing of the *Karura* forest saga, amid unparalleled cynicism in the history of the country, coming from the people who are supposed to be the custodians of what is national and public. It dawns that there is nothing more like national interest or a national heritage because as the play dramatically captures, Moi's own predecessor did exactly these things. In the midst of such morass, any lone voices of reason such as the one of John Keen then, are scorned at and ridiculed¹³.

In the play, the incident around sharing the hippo meat illustratively and metaphorically captures the tensions around, the national cake. The hippo is supposed to be a large enough animal that can be shared around but unfortunately there are those others who want it all to themselves. What the play does is to avoid the possibility of such collective sharing, of the hippo meat, and instead didactically uses it to recollect the trodden path with its fractions in Kenya's first republic-the Kenyatta regime. The point is about how the Kenyatta government as it were, sidelined most of the country from the 'hippo meat,' and the attendant folly of never knowing

that a quiet, even naïve Moi would snatch it. This scenario according to the moral of the drama is fast replayed, as different national factions want to capture FORD, and they fall privy to the very vice Tshitabwa foretold. And that is exactly how they proceed to lose the opportunity of getting access; through such pristine and ill-defined sense of purpose, ('killer blow was mine'; three of us played the major role',) that eventually sees the country bleeding to this day.

Drumbeats is also about regenerating the negative aspects of ethnicity. It identifies the fact that there have always been some hyper-ethnic chauvinists who heighten and fuel hegemonic politics, and in my analysis this is what highlights the fact often ignored or deleted: ethnic groups in the post-colony as themselves sites of confounding heterogeneity, rather than the assumed homogeneity. What I mean here is that the various ethnic groups that constitute Kenya are seen here as themselves differentiated, hence the attempt by the more moderate among them to try and preach sense. It really means that Oby is making a referent to the reality in which various ethnic groups in Kenya, for instance the Gikuyu, have tended to be criticised in general, without due regard to those among them who may not subscribe to the negative mentalities. Thus, when Wakarimu reprimands the rest, "how can we take the whole carcass?" (DOK, 43), it becomes a cogent reminder of the "big ethnicities" versus the "small ethnicities" politics, that in fact catapulted and even assured the Moi ascendancy and hold in the post-Kenyatta period.

Conclusion

It is perhaps useful to round off this analysis by reiterating two points. The first has to do with the ending of the *sigana*, which in the script features the incident of sharing the head of the hippo and how this continues that project of allegorising Kenya in terms of its consumability as food or fruit. This is perhaps where I found the play either having run out of the steam, or better still, finding itself, confounded by the complexity of the problem at hand. The argument to quote Chinaminifu, in the play, is that, "the head cannot, can never be divided... the moulder himself decreed that the head of any beast killed for food must have its head intact.." (DOK, 44). Subsequently it takes foreign powers hilariously named, Odolla; Tsipoundi and Mayeni (Dollars, Pounds and Yens) to try and restore order.

But as Mulezi points out, these are but “traders in human tears and sweat, skin and bone, and breath and flesh...”(DOK, 47).

What is significant here is that the play in a trite fidelity to history, tries to capture those extemporaneous days when these foreign ambassadors tried to no avail, to speak to the fractions in FORD as a basis for consolidating their political unity and hopefully defeat Moi in the coming elections.¹⁴ It is not to say that these powers were themselves uninformed of the real causative factors behind these incurable ethnic fractions within the oppositional political front. Rather, the interest by the playwright at this point in time, seemed to had been only capture that ever hurting reality: that Africa has to ever stoop so low before foreign powers, just to resolve problems that it could very easily adjudicate by itself.

It is this state of affairs, and the clear exasperation that this period engendered on artists as it did to quite a wide section of the Kenyan society, that seems to force the play into a world tinted with mythicised explanations and solutions. The scramble for the head of the animal, would of course seem to capture very well one of the banalities of the post-colony, yet, on a closer reading, one cannot fail to notice that the play is equally questioning the basic principles of equity and fair-play, which seem to be central to a prognosis of the Kenyan political problem. In particular it seems that the desire for a greater Kenyan nationhood, built on well known universal principles of democracy is being sacrificed in the name of an equally absurd myth that seems to assert that power (the animal head in this case), cannot be shared. Taken to its full logical end, it would be a confirmation of what Fabian found to his consternation, during his fieldwork in the in the Congo when one villager reprimanded him for trying to share the chicken gizzard, for to use the mythical logic, “power is eaten whole”(Fabian 1990).

What finally happens is that it takes the return by *Nyamurungu* (the God reincarnate), to remind them of the old Kiswahili wisdom: *kikulacho kinguoni mwako* (that which eats you is in your clothes). In a spit of intertextual communication that easily recalls Ngugi, (*Mother Sing for me*), and the monster imagery of *Devil on the Cross*, we are told:

You cannot tell how many mouths the ogre has, can you? When you think you have tied up all his hands, another hand spreads out.. the ogres are no

longer human to have sex like ours. No they are just all mouth and stomach.”
(DOK, 52)

This, indeed, is Oby’ (and group’s) diagnosis of the disease afflicting our symbols of power. The painful struggle is then about how to free this post-colonial ruler from the slavery of greed that so mutates him as to turn against his kin and his country. In the play, we are moved to an admirable portrait of the grotesque; an overly staffed body akin to the fantasy world only, in the belief that if we overfeed these species it will be possible to kill them:

the ogres come in and they are lavished with harvested things, maize paw-paw, avocados, oranges such that all their hands are laden, some are put into their pockets, they oblige and even try to gather more in the mouth, ears rectum etc...When they are thus laden the dance comes to a stop suddenly. They have been disarmed. They try to speak but their mouths are full of food...(DOK, 53)

What follows is the classical artistic escape, and to my reading a rather sorry ending to a very powerful and creative enterprise that we have been through. The Ogres in that grotesque image of an overfed human species, now real predators as Ayi Kwei Armah would call them, are not subjected to justice. Unexpectedly, they are spared the verdict of death, much to the annoyance of the audience. At this point Wasayengai re-emerges to admonish that they can be cleansed, “so that they rejoin our midst.”(54). This is the mythical ancient African wisdom; the excessive generosity syndrome, which to my reading is utterly contemptible in the circumstances. That questionable African wisdom is spelt thus:

A mother does not throw away the child who defecates on her lap. She cleans its bottom, patting it gently, lovingly...”(54).

I find this kind of ending ludicrous, and as already said, it seems to be an escape from a disturbing reality that sees the artist yodelling around with the idea of an ever-magnanimous Africa, which in the end turns such human misery into the perpetual cyclic that they have become.

Notes

¹These scripts in their number would be called ‘unpublished’ if the word is utilized and confined to the arguably, limiting sense of printing and distribution through

known/established 'publishing' houses. On the other hand, their creators believe themselves to be well 'published', often way beyond what they would get as merely 'printed' playwrights!

²This is only a simple summary regarding the nature of this art-form. See, Roscoe and Ogutu (1974). It also goes without saying that in practice, a *Sigana* can be told, virtually anywhere if the circumstances so permit.

³ A fairly well-known diversionary ploy by the Kenyan ruling establishment that reached its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

⁴ *Nyungu ya Mawe* show conformed to the *sigana* trend and in the booklet is sub-titled, "a trilogy of African and African-American story telling presentation with *dance, drama* and *chant*."

⁵ Part of the ethnic rhetoric in Kenya has often been the claim that the Luo are so used to the opposition that they would oppose a government led by one of their own. Seriously though, the statement is also a reference to the role *Jaramogi* Oginga Odinga (a Luo) and later his son Raila, played in standing up to the governments of both Kenyatta and Moi with the former being an acclaimed "father of opposition politics in Kenya". In 1997, however Raila decided to abandon the bandwagon of "the opposition" and began "co-operating" with the Moi Government. This, as time has shown, turned out to be only a temporary decision.

⁶ In Ngugi's *Matigari*, Guthera offers herself to the police to release Matigari; just like the prospect in, *The Trial of Dean Kimathi*, where 'woman' orders at the white policeman who does not desire her.

⁷ See Imme Ikiddeh's (1980) deployment of this term in relation to Armah's use of the same, in *Two thousand Seasons* (Armah, 1973)

⁸ These were two of the better known battle-fields during the 'tribal clashes' of 1992

⁹ See some of the dismissals of Grace Ogot's work, *The Promised Land*, solely on this ground, as outlined by Stratton, (1995); and Isidore Okpewho (1983) exposition of the nature and function of the African myth and its purpose.

¹⁰ See Ngugi wa Thiong'o, (1986) *Petals of Blood*. Oxford: Heinemann

¹¹ I am referring here to the dance at the end, where in an impassioned novelistic design the novelist tries to bring about unity among a disparate lot of Africans and their colonial masters as it were, in that historical novel.

¹² One has in mind here, the pervading shit in Armah's *The Beautiful Ones*, and in Soyinka's, *The interpreters*...

¹³ In the referents being framed here by the play, John Keen a former cabinet minister in Moi's government acquired, even if only for a short-lived period, was the title of 'voice of reason'.

¹⁴ For more on this see Smith Hempstone's (1997) *Rogue Ambassador*.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Radio Theatre: Interrogating the Developmental Narratives of Radio Drama in Kenya

Dina Ligaga

Studies in the field of radio have explored the vastness of the medium and its usefulness in society. Specifically, the medium of radio is looked at as a relevant means of communication in Africa. These studies including those carried out by Richard Fardon and Graham Furniss (2000) have shown the multi-faceted ways in which radio's influence and role in the continent can be interrogated. Within this paper, we are interested in the genre of radio drama, and how it acts as an important intersection between the medium of radio, society and its social realities. We are particularly interested in the manner in which development themes are performed and presented to the listeners. We frame the paper within existing radio drama studies in Africa that have shown the genre's close relation to the reality of its listeners. Liz Gunner (2000) has for instance, explored the historical relevance of radio drama in South Africa during the years of apartheid, when the plays could be read as subversive because of the gaps of interpretation that existed within their languages of transmission. Khaya Gqibitole (2002) also explores the relationship of Xhosa language radio dramas, its audiences and the white managers of the radio stations that produced them during the apartheid years in South Africa.

What emerges from such studies is that in looking at radio drama's performance space, one has got to engage with the manner in which it speaks to the reality of its listeners. Within this paper, we read radio drama's performance space as the imaginative space between the text and the listener. The text's engagement with a developmental issue is completed only when its intended and/or underlying messages have been understood.

Thus the paper examines the narratives of *Radio Theatre* that thematically deal with issues of development designed around social and cultural realities of listeners. *Radio Theatre* is one of Kenya's longest running radio drama programmes in the English language. It is a programme that

features one-act plays that run for about 30 minutes each week on the state-controlled Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). The plays are aired every Sunday at 9:30 p.m. with repeats on Thursdays at 10:00 a.m.¹ *Radio Theatre* plays mainly preoccupy themselves with moral narratives set in the domestic sphere. Most of the plays deal with themes of marriage, love, sex and romance which are not just entertaining, but are largely presented as educational. Within a larger context of state-broadcasting, *Radio Theatre* is read as a programme that encourages listeners to consume it as an educational programme that seeks to use domestic themes to teach listeners about common moralities that define the social order in Kenya.

This paper argues that radio drama is a possible site for understanding the discourses of development in Kenya because of its engagements with the reality of listeners. The paper uses theories that encourage a reading of popular mass media forms of soap opera and melodrama as possible sites of social learning. Often, soap operas and melodramas have been dismissed as forms that engage in exaggeration and fantasy. This paper engages in a close reading of a *Radio Theatre* play and analyses ways in which it represents a specific developmental narrative. Through this reading, the paper analyses the strategies that the radio text uses to encourage a particular reading of development by its listeners. We look at the manner in which the play emphasizes certain moral lessons which the listener is supposed to learn. These moral lessons are normally the pivotal point through which these plays are supposed to be understood as developmental.

Community radio and Theatre for Development (TfD): contextualizing radio drama for development

Radio Theatre frames itself within existing discourses of development communication in Africa which argue for the use of communication to improve the livelihoods and well-being of people in underdeveloped or developing nations. The range of themes of its plays suggest their role in dealing with health related problems pertaining to HIV/AIDs and fertility, as well as the socially generated problems of forced marriage on the girl child. The programme is located within existing discourses on radio and Theatre for Development (TfD) in Kenya.

Radio is a crucial tool for development, especially because in many cases in Africa, it is often the only medium available to a large mass of Africans (Fardon and Furniss 2000). In the larger context of development in Africa, radio has been identified by several official bodies such as the State, NGOs and local organizations as a viable tool for disseminating information on issues of health and the personal well-being of citizens through various educational programmes. However, one major criticism against State and NGO's usage of radio has been that communication only takes place through a one-way flow (Mda 1993). In what is often referred to as the top-down communication flow, the development messages often embrace the concerns and interests of those in power, while completely neglecting the needs of the people for whom these messages are intended. As Mda (1993) has argued, this often leads to partial communication where the interests of the people are completely neglected.

Part of the strategy to remedy this one-way flow of communication, according to development communication theorists has been to develop a more participatory approach to communication. Development communication theory refers to the suitable use of a communication strategy that can aid in achieving social change. This approach has been embraced by community radio and TfD practitioners creating a good basis for engaging the participation of citizens at the grassroots level. While TfD has encouraged the use of theatre for purposes of 'social transformation and reformation' (Odhiambo 2004:4), community radio defines itself as a 'medium in which the community participates - as planners, producers and performers - and it is a means of expression of the community rather than for the community.'" (Opoku-Mensah 2000:165). Both these fields of development communication have stressed the need for interaction, participation and community. Zakes Mda (1993:1) has argued that development communication is a means of organizing communication 'so as to increase participation, achieve self-reliance, promote equity, and close communication gaps'.

Fackson Banda has argued that central to the idea of community radio are 'concepts of participation, cultural identity, and empowerment, as well as Freirian notions of dialogic communication' (2003:120). In both community radio and TfD, one finds useful ways of engaging with the media and its constructive use within a community of audiences. The two bodies of work emphasize the sense of participation necessary for

understanding audience patterns of absorbing messages that are often packaged in specific formats.

However, in both community radio and Tfd, the tendency to stress the value of community interaction, and immediate/face-to-face feedback is present. While this is definitely an important aspect for development discussions, what both discourses seem to emphasize is that 'conventional' mass media such as state-run radio do not have a useful development strategy in place because they have a top-down approach to development.

In this paper, we attempt to show that in fact, through creative products such as radio drama, one can examine useful ways in which listeners can benefit from conventional mass media forms. To correct the existing assumptions about such forms' inability to connect with and engage the audience, we look at the narratives of *Radio Theatre*, produced by a state broadcaster, and examine the ways in which development narratives have been represented in the plays, and the particular ways in which messages have been encoded within the plays for possible extraction and use by the listener. One useful way of understanding *Radio Theatre* narratives of development is through an aspect of Entertainment-Education (E-E) which analyses soap opera, melodramas and the telenovela as sites in which development and social change at both individual and social levels can take place. We selectively extract certain aspects of E-E that are applicable to our reading, and attempt to analyse the possibilities that the radio texts offer to be read as developmental narratives.

Entertainment-Education (E-E) and the educational value of soap operas

According to Arvind Singhal et al., 'E-E is the process of purposefully designing and implementing a media message to both entertain and educate in order to increase audience members' knowledge about an educational issue, create favourable attitudes, shift social norms, and change overt behaviour' (2004:5). They add that 'the general purpose of entertainment-education interventions is to contribute to the process of directed social change, which can occur at the level of an individual, community or society'. E-E has been instrumental in showing the many levels at which soap opera and other mass media forms of entertainment can be analysed for their uses in education and information dissemination.

The concept of E-E was developed by a Brazilian creative writer-producer-director, Miguel Sabido in 1970 in a bid to understand the theoretical basis of the telenovela's social function. He mainly used Albert Bandura's social learning theory also known as the social cognitive theory. The social learning or social cognitive theory states that social learning takes place through imitation and observation of others for purposes of 'modelling (imitation of the behaviour of a role model) and self-efficacy (one's perceived ability to adopt recommended behaviour)' (Ogenga 2006:81). The theory is rooted in social psychology, specifically within behavioural theory. Miguel Sabido applied this theory to his reading of soap operas and telenovelas and concluded that these mass media forms had the power to influence people to identify with, imitate and learn from the positive and negative role models often used in melodramatic presentations of narratives.

Soap operas have in this way lent themselves to being read as sources that can be used creatively for purposes of development. In Africa they engage with reality in a way that the listeners can relate to, and thus read them as 'authorities' that can adequately comment on issues affecting their lived experiences. Recent studies on the educational value of soap operas include Fredrick Ogenga's (2006) examination of *Tsha Tsha*, a South African television soap opera that was created around the concepts of HIV/AIDS and other social issues that affect young people South Africa. *Tsha Tsha* also explores a number of other realities including joblessness, crime, relationships and the social lives of a small rural society. Ogenga analyses the effects of the programme on a group of young HIV positive men in Soweto and attempts to draw conclusions regarding its effects on their attitudes and social behaviour. By applying the theory of E-E, we argue that soap operas can be read as spaces that encourage audiences to engage with the messages being given in the texts for purposes of self-development.

In this paper, we analyze one *Radio Theatre* play, *Immoral Network* which uses Bandura's idea of character identification through observation, and attempt to analyse the presentation of major characters within the good/evil dichotomy. We argue that in order to emphasize a developmental lesson, these dichotomies have to be made clear, as the play seeks to encourage a particular kind of reading among listeners. The paper also looks at the different strategies that the plays use, including multiple

storylines, exaggeration and 'misrepresentation' to emphasize different lessons in the play.

Immoral Network

Immoral Network is a story about a family of three, Otieno a lawyer, Njeri, his wife and Peter their only child. The story is told in a multiple storyline format, a characteristic of the soap opera form (Geraghty 1991). In the first strand of the story, Otieno goes to his village in a rural area of Luo land in Kenya to 'inherit' Akinyi, his recently deceased brother's wife. However, it turns out that his brother, Onyango died of AIDS. The implication of this is that Akinyi is also HIV positive. Another strand of this storyline focuses on Akinyi, who, as the first scene opens, is mourning the death of her husband. As she mourns, Tero, a village 'cleanser' comes in and has sex with her, as part of a traditional practice of cleansing to rid the clan of the 'chira' or curse that has befallen it. A third strand of the story focuses on Njeri's reaction to Otieno's recent 'inheritance' of Akinyi. As an act of vengeance, Njeri has an affair with the family doctor Dr Ole Sangale. This storyline gives birth to another that focuses on Dr Ole Sangale's proclamations that having multiple sexual partners is a traditional practice in his culture. Another strand of the play focuses on Otieno's seduction of and eventual promiscuous relationship with Mueni, the family's domestic worker. Mueni succumbs to his advances when he offers her money, and eventually gets pregnant. The last strand of the play focuses on Peter, Otieno's son, a rich spoilt sixteen-year-old boy who sneaks out of boarding school after stealing and pawning some laboratory equipment, which he trades for a lot of money. He uses this money to seduce Mueni, and eventually has unprotected sex with her.

The narrative of *Immoral Network* emphasises two broad issues, the role of culture in spreading HIV/AIDS and the negative repercussions of irresponsible sexual behaviour. Both issues reflect the initial campaigns around prevention against HIV/AIDS that were used mostly in the 1980s when the first AIDS casualties were identified. This was also a period of great ignorance on how HIV/AIDS was transmitted. As can be seen through the several storylines above, the play creates the impression of the vulnerability of all the characters in the play because of this ignorance. *Immoral Network* was first aired in 1987, a period when HIV/AIDS was still considered a mysterious disease, and around which a lot of myths were

created. The narrator's introduction to *Immoral Network* voices several of the concerns that surrounded the disease:

HIV/AIDS message designs through the media in Kenya have been laid out for 3 different kinds of audiences. For the elite, and the knowledgeable, for those who depend on the elite and knowledgeable in decision making and, or those who are illiterate and need persuasion for behavioural change ... It is an open secret that in parts of Kenya and Africa at large HIV/AIDS among other health risks, is ... spread through culture and outdated traditional practices affecting even the educated and the knowledgeable [and] the educated traditionalist ... We created this radio drama to help reach out to those caught up in the tradition of widow inheritance or any other culture which contributes to the spread of HIV/AIDS in rural Kenya.

The narrator's words shape the intention of the programme, which is to create awareness around HIV/AIDS and the practices that aid in spreading it. The narrator also categorically maps his target audience, echoing an early AIDS campaign strategy that was used in the eighties all over Kenya: "AIDS Kills". As the narrator speaks, he pauses dramatically before naming the kinds of audiences that the play aims to speak to leaving the listener in no doubt that everyone is targeted. He also places emphasis on the word culture to impress upon the listener that this is one major but often ignored form through which HIV/AIDS is spread.

One of the strategies that the play uses to illustrate its concerns about the spread of HIV/AIDS, is the use of examples through characterization. Karin Barber's (2000) idea of example shows the necessity of demonstrating lessons rather than presenting them as general moral axioms. This gives audiences a chance to extract, fill in gaps and apply the lessons they have learnt from the plays into their own lives. Barber's theory can be combined with Bandura's theory of self-efficacy to explain how listeners can identify with and reject certain behaviours based on Bandura's positive and negative role modelling theory. According to his theory, 'individuals exercise greater ability to be in control of their own actions based on how they perceive themselves as able to perform in a manner that will result in expected outcomes' (Ogenga 2006:70). This ability to control their own destinies is based on the observation and imitation of others, normally positive role models, and the rejection of negative role models (Bandura 1977). In other words, people learn by observing other people's mistakes and achievements and model themselves around those aspects of

behaviour that they desire. In *Immoral Network* the listener is given such a chance through the presentation of characters that often make wrong choices and are eventually punished.

The play maps out the character of Otieno as a negative role model. He is a lawyer, who is recognizably modern and educated. However, Otieno has a very limited view of cultural practices such as wife inheritance in an era of HIV/AIDS. Within the Luo culture, the brother of the deceased is supposed to 'inherit' his brother's family to ensure the continuity of his brother's lineage. Otieno takes it upon himself to adopt this traditional practice. In an argument with his wife Njeri, Otieno's standpoint about the cultural practice of wife inheritance, his traditional duties and his ideas about HIV/AIDS emerge:

Njeri: Baba Peter, this is too much and I will take it no more. I cannot share you with another woman. You will choose between me and Akinyi.

Otieno: We have gone over this again and again. I am a man, Mama Peter. Akinyi is my late brother's wife and so she is my wife now. I am a man of two wives. If you cannot take it, take off!

Njeri: How many nights do you spend at Akinyi's before you spend a single night here? Akinyi and her children have become the only people you think of. You have neglected us. Another thing, how in these dangerous days did you think of taking your brother's wife?

Otieno: Njeri, before you married me you knew I came from *that* community. My brother is dead and I must do the needful and I will not discuss the topic further.

Njeri: I will divorce you!

Otieno: When you make up your mind, hire me for legal advice. I am a lawyer remember? I am not ready to allow a curse on myself.

Njeri: By the way what killed your brother?

Otieno: He was sick.

Njeri: What sickness?

Otieno: I am a lawyer not a doctor. But to the best of my clan's knowledge it was a curse, *chira* and I agree with them.

Njeri: And if it was not *chira*?

Otieno: Then tell me what it is. He had a complex of illnesses, some people say it was AIDS, but *chira* was there before AIDS. So let no primary teacher tell me about things I know. I will never allow a curse on me.

Otieno is constructed as a stubborn and rigid man with tendencies to be excessively patriarchal in viewpoint. He refuses to listen to his wife's concerns, and tries to force her into silence by raising his voice forcefully against her. His voice is also sarcastic when he tells her to consider hiring him as her lawyer when she threatens to divorce him. He proudly embraces the fact that he now has a second wife, a fact that Njeri is clearly not happy with. Within this categorization, it becomes possible for the listener to understand Otieno's ignorance about HIV/AIDS. For instance, when Njeri asks him if he knows what his brother died of, his voice is hesitant, lingering doubtfully around the words *chira*, the curse. He hangs on desperately to this word, saying repeatedly, "I will never allow a curse on me". His ignorance about AIDS is not because he is not aware of it, but that he chooses to rigidly hold on to his traditional ideals. He is aware that some people said his brother died of AIDS, but he quickly adds, "but *chira* was there before AIDS". The idea of AIDS as *chira* forms part of the early explanations of the disease among the Luo (Muriungi 2004). *Chira* was often considered a punishment to somebody who engaged in anything that was considered taboo, such as incest. It is only with growing public awareness that people began realising that AIDS was a sexually transmitted disease and not a curse.

The listener is also introduced to ideas of gender and power in the spread of AIDS. This emerges in Otieno's relationship with Mueni, the house-help. In one scene he summons Mueni to a room, established through the sound of a door slamming, and Otieno's words, "okay, next ..." after his son bids him farewell. Such codes act as cues for the listener to identify the setting of the scene. Otieno summons Mueni whose location at the time is indicated by her distance from the microphone and the sounds of approaching footsteps. In the ensuing dialogue, the listener is exposed to a callous demand for sex by Otieno, in exchange of money:

Otieno: Mueni, has anyone ever told you that you are a beautiful girl? And for that reason I am going to promote you from a housemaid to a very important person in this house ... Mueni, you are not a baby now. You are a woman. Listen, I can make you everything you have dreamed to be in your life. Mueni be my girl.

Mueni: Let me go!

Otieno: You will go when I say so. Take this [sic] five hundred shillings. All yours ... Mueni, there is more if you say yes. Come on Mueni, Mueni, come on, say yes ...

On one level, Otieno uses his power as a man to force Mueni to have sex with him. Mueni's plea for him to let her go and the fact that he still proceeds to have sex with her, shows the helplessness of Mueni both because Otieno physically overpowers her, but also because as a house-girl, she is in a position of less power over her boss. However, the play introduces the notion of money as a form of negotiation into this relationship. As we see later, Mueni finds out that she has the power to get more money and elevate her social status if she grants Otieno sexual favours. As such, this relationship continues until Mueni finds out that she is pregnant, leaving the listener in no doubt that she has been having unprotected sex with Otieno. In the end, Otieno is 'punished' for his promiscuity and irresponsible sexual behaviour when he finds out he is HIV positive.

A listener is thus able to systematically follow the development of a single character whose behaviour is demonstrated through the way he speaks and the words that he uses, and can choose to learn from the characters' mistakes and successes. As has been argued, based on the behaviour of the character, the observer (in our case, the listener) can then choose to imitate the behaviour or to avoid it, for the sake of self-development. In the case of Otieno, the play deliberately creates a man whose ignorance defines his own fate. Because he is constantly portrayed as a negative role model, the listener is bound to reject his behaviour for the sake of his/her own well-being. This is one way in which listeners learn through examples.

Another strategy that the play uses to narrate discourses of HIV/AIDS is through exaggeration and stereotyping. The play emphasizes the role of some cultural practices in the spread of HIV/AIDS based on circulating discourses in Kenya around 'backward' cultural practices and the manner in which these have encouraged the spread of AIDS. The play starts with an analysis of the Luo practice of 'wife inheritance' and its relevance in a period of HIV/AIDS. The play begins with the voice of a woman wailing:

Mama ayoo, mama ayoo, Onyango ayoo, my Onyango is gone, who will take care of me [?] How will my kids go to school, who will pay their school fees [?] Mama ayoo, mayoooo, mayoooo, My husband is dead, uuuuuuuuuuu! I am still young Onyango, who will warm my body, Ohhhh, Onyango! Mayoooo!

It is important for the play to identify that this scene is taking place in a Luo environment. One of the indicators that the listener is given is through the language of the dirge. Although the play is in English, it contains expressions that are local in nature. Within the dirge, the mourner mentions a Luo name, Onyango, which aids the listener to identify the community and setting of the scene. This opening dirge introduces the listener to the Luo culture whose practice of wife inheritance has been a site for criticism both in gender and HIV/AIDS discourses. Akinyi finds herself at the mercy of this traditional practice. As she is wailing, she gets a visit from Tero, the 'village cleanser'. At the time when HIV/AIDS was first discovered, *chira* had to be cleansed through a traditional ceremony. Tero, the 'cleanser' is introduced in the play to present this aspect of the tradition.

The presentation of this cultural practice is however exaggerated in the play. Rather than being based on actual fact, the story has been drawn from existing urban legends about the Luo practice of wife inheritance. In the play, two different Luo terminologies for different traditional Luo practices are interchangeably used, indicating the hastiness of presentation, as well as deliberate misinformation to emphasise certain aspects of the tradition that are pertinent to the larger story, while suppressing others. For instance, while the Luo practices of wife inheritance (*tero*) and grieving (*tero buru*) exist, the manner in which they are presented in this play is particularly exaggerated to reinforce the message that certain traditional practices can contribute towards the spread of HIV/AIDS. 'Tero buru' is a Luo ceremony usually carried out upon the death of a *jaduong* (big man of the home) as a way of honouring his death, and giving it the respect it deserves. Wife inheritance (*tero*) is a separate culture in which a guardian is appointed (usually the brother or male cousin/relative of the dead man) to 'look after' the family that the *jaduong* has left behind. Because it is a traditional practice, it is often frowned upon by more modern women who in most cases choose to take care of their families on their own after the death of their spouses. With the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, this practice is quickly losing its significance and appeal among the Luos, although at the time of airing of *Immoral Network*, it was one of the most significant

points of contention in the Luo culture. Thus the mixing of Luo terminologies for different practices points towards the aim of the play.

The play deliberately inserts the idea of a village cleanser who walks around villages having sex with women recently bereaved in order to cleanse them.

Tero: I am the 'cleanser'. I am here to cleanse you ... we have to abide by the traditions ... if we delay it further; a curse might befall on [sic] our clan. We have to do it now before more people start dying. Furthermore, I am the only cleanser around. I have seven other appointments today. Those women lost their husbands just like you and they are ready, waiting for me to cleanse them ... since I started this traditional duty, I have cleansed 720 women ...

Listening to Tero speak, the absurdity of the situation emerges even as one attempts to imagine the horrors of this culture. While it is clear that the scriptwriter is basing his knowledge on urban legends, the way he packs the play with specific horrors, points towards the intention to build fear around certain HIV/AIDS discourses that have become part of the urban legends regarding the Luo practice of wife inheritance. His intention is to reach a wider audience, where such misrepresentations are consumed as real. Instead of correcting some of these stereotypical misconceptions, the play actually re-emphasizes them by playing on their popularity.

Another cultural practice that the play introduces through exaggeration is that of the Maasai culture of 'spear planting'. One circulating misconception of this practice is that among the Maasai a man is 'allowed' to 'plant his spear' (literally and metaphorically) in front of another man's hut, as an unspoken message that he is having sex with the man's wife. According to the stories, the owner of the house is supposed to find himself a separate place to sleep for the night. When Njeri, Otieno's wife begins having an affair with the family doctor as a form of retaliation against Otieno's 'inheritance' of Akinyi, this aspect of the Maasai culture emerges in a dialogue.

Dr Ole Sangale: I come from a community where you can have a wife whether you are married or not.

Njeri: What?

Dr Ole Sangale: Yes. All you need to do is to plant a spear on the door step of a *manyatta* ... The spear is a sign to show the husband or another man hoping to have sex with that woman that there is another man inside so no one should disturb ... it is our tradition and no one can question it.

Once again, framed in a very patriarchal context, the play brings out the nuances of power and gender imbalance in contexts where the woman is denied a voice to negotiate her sexual preferences. Although Dr Sangale is having sex with Njeri, the manner in which he 'reports' to her the nature of his traditional practice, is an admission of his own sense of ignorance. Like Otieno, Dr Sangale is an educated man who is expected to know better. This irony creates possibilities for the listener to identify him as a negative role model. Like in the case of the Luo cultures, the Maasai tradition is also misrepresented in order to make it accommodate the theme around culture and HIV/AIDS. The practice of spear planting actually has its origins in ideas of hospitality among the Maasai, where a man travelling to a far off place could be allowed to sleep in the main house. He would have to leave his spear outside the hut as a sign of respect for the man in the house. Also, because the spear was normally too long to fit into the *manyatta* (low roofed traditional Maasai huts), he would leave it outside. However, unlike the circulating narratives, he was not allowed to have sex with the man's wife. In *Immoral Network*, this version has been distorted to form a new narrative in which sex becomes a way of unearthing this particular tradition in order to demonstrate how HIV/AIDS is spread in this culture.

Part of this need to exaggerate can be understood as a characteristic of popular culture which often uses urban legends as sources for presenting narratives borrowed from the public sphere. *Immoral Network* borrows from several such narratives. One common narrative is that of the house-girl and her availability to grant sexual favours to the male members of a family. A story appeared in a Kenyan newspaper, about a housemaid/domestic worker who infected a man and his two sons with the HIV virus after she had unprotected sex with each of them. She died after developing AIDS, as did the father and sons. The report adds that this story is even more bizarre because the woman of the house did not contract the disease. While this is just one story, it represents the kinds of 'hidden' narratives of the domestic sphere that circulate through public discourses. Although such kinds of narratives rarely make headline news, they remain a part of everyday life for most Kenyans. The narratives are reported in alternative spaces, and eventually find their way into the public discourse, from where *Radio Theatre* draws its examples.

Although for both Luo and Maasai listeners, the play is potentially problematic, and it therefore may not fully work as a development narrative to them, the underlying lessons often emerge with each exaggeration and listeners can choose to use only aspects of the narrative that interests them. At the end of the play, all of the key participants in this sexual 'misadventure' meet together in the doctor's office, where it is revealed that they each have the virus because none of them used protection during sex. Akinyi has begun developing symptoms of AIDS, which the doctor interprets as a sign that her death is near. Such conclusions show the play's associations of HIV/AIDS with death, a view that has persisted, despite new narratives of hope that have begun to emerge around HIV/AIDS. This is demonstrated in the following play.

Conclusion

While this paper briefly introduces the idea of the developmental play in radio drama, it interrogates the manner in which the narrative is presented to the listener. We argue that *Radio Theatre* plays use strategies of emphasis to create clarity on issues being debated. The paper, though briefly, touches on such strategies, including, stereotypes, misrepresentation and exaggeration, multiple storylines and characterization presented in a dichotomous good/evil dyad.

Notes

¹ This information is based on the production of the programme up to 2006. There have been several changes in KBC since, including the appointment of a new producer, Alex Mbathi who may have brought changes that the researcher may not have taken into consideration. The researcher has however, remained in contact with the former producer, Nzau Kalulu, producer of *Radio Theatre* from the early 1995 to 2006.

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CHAPTER SIX

The Task of the African Translator

Mukoma Wa Ngugi

Translation's ultimate purpose is to express the innermost relation between languages (Walter Benjamin, The Task of the Translator)

Introduction: Limiting the Infinite in African Translation

Given the number of languages and cultures, different histories either before or after the advent of colonialism, and uneven support of African languages in individual countries such as Kenya and Tanzania, anything loosely termed African translation will have to flow in a myriad of ways. We must not have an African Theory of Translation but rather a plethora of Translation Theories that are particular in part or in whole to African languages. Nevertheless as with anything of infinite possibilities, it is crucial to capture or frame some foundational principles that make discussion possible, that serve as a starting point.

The first principle, which will help make the debate manageable is that at a *minimum* three kinds of translation exist in relation to African languages: Where the African Language is the source and therefore translation flows outwards; the African language is the target and the source a language outside of the continent; or where the act of translation is between or intra African Languages. Translating into and intra African languages suffers from the worst kind of neglect – very few translators are translating into and between African languages, and even fewer have attempted to particularize translation theory to African languages.

The second of these principles, closely interacting with the first, is that each act of African translation will have a set of problems that are universal to any translator no matter what language or flow of translation. This is to say that there are problems a translator between French and Italian faces and the African translator in any of the above three configurations will

also face. For example, lack of equivalents, or in the case of poetry, lack of corresponding form - the questions of whether to engage in a metaphrase, a literal phrase for phrase translation, and when do what John Dryden calls an *imitation* – “where the translator...assumes the liberty not only to vary from the words and sense but to forsake them both as he sees occasion” (Weissbort, 146).

The third principle is that a target language related to but distinct from the source language will behave differently in an act of translation than when it is not related to the source language. Each act of translation will raise a different set of problems and call for different solutions. When translating between Kiswahili and isiXhosa, the problems and solutions will be different from those faced when translating between isiXhosa and English. This is to say that linguistic features such as morphology are very much at play.

Due to Africa’s historical relationship to the world, there is a fourth organizing principle. Translating, in a situation where one language has a history of imperial domination and the other of resistance is also a political act. African translation theory has to look at questions of language power relations in this age of globalization; the question of imperial versus resisting languages. In short, translation is a dynamic act in which the living historical questions determine what is being translated, into what language and the process which is to say the nature of the act of translation itself.

Knowledge Production and Translation

The theory that underpins Walter Rodney’s *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* also informs African translation. European languages in the continent and in Europe developed at the direct expense of African languages – that is, English has flourished to the extent it has atrophied Gikuyu language, for example. Knowledge produced by Africans has traditionally flown one way - Africa to Europe through translation. Novels, philosophies, and systems of thought are translated into European languages. But seminal European philosophers, writers and scientists are not translated into African Languages; their ideas remain sealed in languages that only the African elite have access to. The majority of the African population in this exchange has served as a laboratory for others;

cultures studied and quantified, needles poked into bodies to extract medical data, and labor and raw materials converted into European goods.

Language was used by colonialism to discipline. By divorcing the African from his or her culture, access to the world through one's own lens was also lost. In the colonial framework, African languages had no political, scientific or economic function. The only participation possible in the political, scientific, and economic colonial worlds was through mastering the colonizing language. As European languages became the containers of new scientific and philosophical knowledge, African languages were in an agonizing process of atrophy. They became social languages spoken in the privacy of homes and at social events. As the relationship between African and European languages continued through neo-colonialism and now globalization, African languages found that the world had left them behind. Therefore translating, let's say, a science fiction novel that uses pedestrian physics on time travel into Gikuyu will require much more invention and coinage of new words than it would if I was translating it into a European language which has from the beginning kept up with the debate of time warps. This is not an immutable condition: Gikuyu language, as a result of history, and a carefully designed policy that promoted English over African languages is behind existing knowledge.

This is not to suggest that African languages do not have the capacity to carry scientific knowledge, but to point out that translating into an African language will require more than fluency and the target language dictionary. Some words and concepts, depending on the text, simply do not exist. Every translator, no matter the language faces this problem. But for the translator translating into an African language, the gaps will be much larger and perhaps in this regard, the African translator should ideally have a community of other translators and native speakers to constantly fall back upon. Imperialism wanted to fossilize African languages – it did not quite succeed – and therefore the translator has much to work with. But nevertheless, out of languages whose speakers have been convinced they cannot carry physics or medical terms, the translator must convince them that it is indeed possible.

In the coinage and invention of words, an act that languages naturally perform as they engage the world around them, an act that is constantly

undermined when it comes to African languages for any number of reasons, the translator has to make sure the translated text is intelligible. The translator's mandate is not to create a new language, but rather have the translated text fit intelligibly in the target language. The translator therefore has to keep checking with others. Can *kahinda gakinje* (literally 'folded' time in Gikuyu) mean *time warp* or is it too much of a stretch? Would it in fact sound ridiculous to the Gikuyu ear? Are there philosophical concepts that perhaps can convey the idea of time warp? Conversely it will require updating words in the African language to carry multiple meanings. In Kiswahili the word, *mtandao* means *internet* as well as *spider web*. Here, a word with one set of meanings, now has another.

The magnitude of the problem before the African translator should not be hidden behind the universalism that across languages there will lack equivalents. If I want to translate Stephen Hawking's rather accessible physics book, *The History of Time*, having never read a physics, chemistry, or philosophy book in Gikuyu, I will run into problems that a German translator will not. The German language has been keeping with new theories and inventions. Gikuyu has not – new knowledge for the Gikuyu speaker is stored in the English language. In short, I have more work to do.

The African translator is historically handicapped – a handicap that he or she must overcome by engaging his or her language with the rest the world and with existing and growing knowledge in all its complexities. This will, and it is nothing if it is not first a will to do justice by African languages, is a political act.

The Politics Translating intra-African Languages

For most peoples, the idea that you can have a national literature expressed in the former colonizer's language is strange to say the least. The Chinese would laugh at the idea of a national literature in Japanese. But not only has the idea of a national literature in English or French been accepted; writing in an African language is actively resisted. Therefore, an African translator translating into African language has to fight the same battles and counter the same arguments as a writer who is writing in an African language. That is – translating into an African language makes for small market (in which case there would be no Danish or Swedish literature),

not enough literate readers (though one is likely to be able to read in his or her language than English), promotes ethnic chauvinism while the European language promotes national reconciliation (if one forgets colonialism and global imperialism) – and the arguments continue. Translating between African languages ironically requires fewer resources since most Africans speak more than two languages. African translation as a literary field will not lack for candidates.

This resistance to working in African languages has an immediate and pragmatic problem. In a continent that intellectually mimics Europe, a translator who takes the leap might find a publisher who is willing to publish a translated work by Shakespeare or Wordsworth, itself an important accomplishment. But a translator from, let's say, Spanish, Hindi or Chinese, important languages that are not seen in center of the world where all languages should meet, will simply not find a publisher. Neither will the African translator translating between two African languages. Masizi Kunene's poetry will not exist in Yoruba for example, because no publisher will touch such a translation.

By the same token there is very little literary criticism being produced in African languages. Thus the writer, the critic, the reader and the publisher, the educational and political system are all complicit in the atrophy of African languages. Yet just like the few writers, literary critics, publishers and starved readers who are slowly expanding the playing field for African languages, the translator simply has to jump in with both feet. The translator makes possible what the African writer or critic cannot. The translator makes possible a conversation between two, three or more African languages.

Translating intra-African languages involves concerns that are shared by all translators. But these concerns become peculiar by virtue of taking different shades depending which of the three political acts (from, to and intra-African languages) of translating the African translator engages in. One concern might diminish while another gets heightened. In order to highlight the often glossed over differences let us look at how these principles interact with one another in the translating of Shaaban Robert's poem, *Titi La Mama* from Kiswahili into English, and Kiswahili into English and Langston Hugh's *A Dream Deferred* from English into Gikuyu. These two poems, short, deceptively simple, accessible and aesthetically beautiful

are widely popular in their respective orbits. Following the analysis are the original poems and their translations as well as literal translations (trots).

Translating three ways – Kiswahili into Gikuyu and English into Gikuyu and Kiswahili into English

A superficial separation between the social context that produces the poem (what for the duration of this essay I will call the *under-text*) and the language and words contained in the text, allows us to tease out the differences in the three instances of African translation outlined at the beginning. A poem does not exist in and of itself; the times the poem is written in and the times in which the poem is read give meaning to it. Therefore the culture that produces the poem and the culture into which the poem is translated will influence the choices the translator makes. Anyone in the United States reading Langston Hugh's *Dream Deferred* today will not help but hear echoes of Martin Luther King Junior's *I have A Dream* Speech even though the speech was given thirty or so years after the poem was written. The poem and the speech have become intertwined in a common tapestry of continuing African American marginalization – the continued deferment of freedom. Time has added another layer of complexity to the poem. Time and space are therefore factors that will influence the choices the translator makes.

In a move therefore that appears counter-intuitive, to translate the poem into Gikuyu the translator does not need Vladimir Nabokov's mountain of footnotes to carry the history and social context in which the poem was written. The poem resonates with the same collective tragedy in Gikuyu. The trials and tribulations of Kenyans with colonialism and flag independence makes the poem immediately accessible. Suffering has made Gikuyu and African American cultures mutually intelligible. However, the same poem perhaps in a European language where the social context is not living, where African/African American suffering isn't part of that society's undercurrent, footnotes might be needed in order for the reader to grasp or tap into the full tragedy of the poem.

But what happens to the *under-text*, the living history of *Titi La Mama* when I translate it from Kiswahili into Gikuyu? A contemporary poem in that it was written in the 1960's, the main worry for the translator becomes

the questions of sound. Because both languages live next to each other, are close together in the Bantu family of languages, the task of the African translator will have more to do with the internal workings of the poems as opposed to the under-text that informs the original. An example will suffice: When translating into English the word *mbwa* (in the context of the poem meaning female dog) becomes *sow*. The translator does not want the word *bitch*, the correct translation, for obvious reasons. In the Kiswahili original, dog is used to show that even in the lowliest and dirtiest of animals, puppies will love the mother's milk. But in an English context, where dogs are loved as pets, the contrast loses its power. But when translating the poem into Gikuyu, *mbwa* becomes *ngui*, a terrible insult in Gikuyu thus keeping the shock in the contrast alive.

In the Gikuyu translation of the Kiswahili poem, the under-text much like in the case of *A Dream Deferred* is not lost. People who have not lost a language might not grasp the extent of the tragedy. A culture that is imperialist will not allow the poem in without wanting to ingest it and spit out a translation that has at least been made palatable. The English language resists the Kiswahili poem because the historical context is lost, because it can only be impervious to it. But the poem in the original language does not need to mention colonialism, or the civilizing missions that denigrated African cultures, that loved the caricatures it produced; the poems edifice is this history itself.

A good Gikuyu translation will not need to hit the reader over the head with living history, colonialism and the psychosis of it, the psychosis of loving someone else's mother is the template. Immediately I mention language and mother, a history of loss has been tapped into. Thus the title of the Gikuyu translation, *Iria ria Ma itu* (the milk of our truth and at the same time my mother's milk), is a choice made purely because *Runyondo rwa Nyinal/Maitu* (A/My Mother's breast) sounds terrible even when it conveys the same meaning as *Titi La Mama*. The English translation, in order to carry the politics, has to do more work though. Hence the title changes from *A Mother's Breast* to Kiswahili in order to hint at the politics of language. Words like, *salve* and *wounds*, are used to try and contain this history. Because history has done this work for it, the poem can go on to do other things, like create beauty through intricate sound patterns.

In translating the poem from Kiswahili into English, sound is sacrificed for meaning. But because both Kiswahili and Gikuyu share the same concord noun system, alliteration, cacophony or other manipulations of sound are easy maintain. In sound, the Gikuyu translation is more faithful than the English translation. In fact once the Kiswahili original establishes the history of colonialism and the politics of language, it runs on the beauty of sound. In this regard, it is not a cerebral poem, you do not think its meaning, you hear it first. From the very start, with the high conga sounds of *Titi la mama litamu hata*, beauty is being woven through sound.

It is this beauty that the English version looses with the awkward but necessary – *A mother's breast*. The Gikuyu translation to the English ear might sound harsh, perhaps even to the Kiswahili ear but standing alone, it does weave intricate sounds as a result of the linguistic features that flow with Kiswahili – such as concord noun agreements. In both languages, the linguistic features contribute to the overall meaning of the poem – beauty and intricacy of human language.

There are other things that the Gikuyu translation can do better than the English translation – it can borrow and easily own Kiswahili words. The Gikuyu word for perfume is *maguta magutararika* which would be too heavy for this translation. But there is another Gikuyu word that was borrowed from Kiswahili which is commonly used for perfume – *Maraci*. Kiswahili, because the linguistic structure, lends itself more easily to being owned by Gikuyu.

Because the complexity of the poem lies in the under-text of a complex social world, and the words that are on the surface weave beauty through sound, translating in English risks either fossilizing the poem or infantilizing it. In short translating the words on their surface without translating the roots infantilizes the poem. There is a difference here between simplicity and regressing the poem. Both poems, *Titi La Mama* and *A Dream Deferred* run on simplicity – the words are easily accessible, the images are practically everyday. But they are also very complex poems that use the familiar to defamiliarize the reader into looking at the world anew. Yet in the English translation, the following line – *A mother's breast is the sweetest, a sow it may be* - risks becoming something other than the first line in the Kiswahili original. In the Gikuyu translation of *Titi La Mama*, even if some of the grace is inevitably lost, the complexity is not lost.

Where else the Hughes poem does not lose its grace of simplicity or transported into another historical era when translated into Gikuyu because it finds an equally complex if different social *under-text*, Titi La Mama translations into English border on being terrible – some use *Thou* and *Thee* when addressing the language thus turning the poem into a biblical relic.

The point here is not to suggest that the Kiswahili poem is not translatable into English – far from it. For the non-African English speaker, the poem stands on its own. It will have own its own aesthetic and political beauties. The English translation does in some instances defamiliarize such a reader with the ideas and concepts as “sow’s breast” or milk. By the same token it challenges the English reader to think about other languages and English itself. As it should be. Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales* against the high tides of Latin and French. English in the 13th and 14th Century was the sow’s milk, unwanted, bitter, disgusting, uncivilized to drink but writers like Chaucer insisted that it was sweeter to the native speaker than French and Latin. English did not come into its own until Romanticism and even then it still had its own share of detractors who wistfully looked back to the days of Latin and French.

The point then is not to value one kind of translation over another, or one language over another, which has indeed been the colonial project, but rather to value all languages though translations that flow freely from and into multiple languages. This also calls for welcoming translation theories that at once recognize a common humanity. Consequently such theories will recognize the universality and peculiarities of the translator’s task depending on the languages in conversation.

The Task of the African Translator

The Task of the African Translator, which is to contribute to the growth of African languages, at minimum, can therefore be seen as setting to accomplish the following:

- Translating between African languages. And in translating intra-African languages, a recognition that different African languages will call for different approaches. In addition to the universal questions such as those of equivalence and compensation, there will be other sets of

questions depending on how close, linguistically and socially the source language is to the target language.

- Putting in African Languages in conversation with other languages that offer a historical and political solidarity e.g. Spanish. There is no reason why Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* should not be in Kiswahili or Gikuyu.
- Translating from European languages into African languages – so that other forms of knowledge be stored and accessed in an African language. There is of course a crucial point here which relates to how we choose what to translate and what not to translate. That which the United States calls its best works of literary imagination might be exclusive of literatures that are in solidarity with African literatures. Thus the translator will translate different people's literatures that include that belonging to African Americans, Native Americans, Women writers – a peoples literature.
- Contributing to the growth of African Translation theories. The African translator should, while translating, also consider how the choices he or she is making are applicable outside the work at hand – and how they can be systematized.

The act of translating African literature is a political act. The task of the African translator is therefore political.

Poems: Originals and translated

Kiswahili: Titi la Mama - Shaaban Robert

*Titi la mama litamu, hata likiwa la mbwa,
Kiswahili naazimu, sifayo iliyofumbwa,
Kwa wasiokufahamu, niimbe ilivyo kubwa,
Toka kama mlizamu, funika palipozibwa,
Titile mama litamu, jingine halishi hamu.*

*Lugha yangu ya utoto, hata sasa nimekua,
Tangu ulimi mzito, sasa kusema najua,
Ni sawa na manukato, moyoni mwangu na pua,
Pori bahari na mto, napita nikitumia,
Titile mama litamu, jingine halishi hamu.*

English

A Mother's breast is sweet to her young. Even a sow's!
My mother - tongue I declare - I will sing of your brightness
to the blind and those who have long forgotten you. Mother,
feed, flow, salve our wounds and unclog our choking veins.

A mother's breast is sweet, another simply will not fulfill.

Mother, as a child my tongue was weighed down. Now
that I can speak I see you were all around me, a perfume
to my heart and senses. Whether through the wilderness
the river Nile or the Indian ocean - Mother, you carry me across.

My mother's breast is sweet, another won't satisfy my longing.

Kikikuyu: Iria ra Maitu

Runyondo rwa maitu rwi-cama. Ona rwi rwa ngui
Githweri nindatua, ndoiga kuri matarakuririkana
nguina uria wega muhithe, uria wi munene
Maitu tiririka, uma tari mukiha uhature kuria kuhingikite
Runyondo rwa maitu, rwi murio rungi rutininaga thuti

Kuma rurimi rwakwa rwi ruritu ndi mwana, nginyagia riu
ndakurire na kwaria ni njui, ruthiomi rwakwa nita
maraci magicanuka ngoroini kana ngimahihia.
Weruini kana gatagati ka iria, ningithagio ni we.

Runyondo rwa maitu, rwi murio rungi rutininaga thuti

A Dream Deferred - Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

Mwihoko Wa Gwitiriria

Mwihoko ingiitererithio ri ni kii gikikaga?

*No kuma na kugonda—
ta thabibu riuaini?
Kana ni kuhoha ta kironda—
nginya ukoimia mahira?
Utararikaga ta nyama mbuthu
Kana umaga kuma—
Ta ngogoyo nduru?*

*Kana mwihoko uhohaga
Ta murigo muritu?*

Kana, ni ututhukaga?

Kiswahili/Gikuyu/English Trots: Mother's Breast and A Dream Deferred

*Titi la Mama
Runyondo rwa nyina
A mother's breast*

*Titi.....la mama..... litamu,hata likiwa la mbwa,
Runyondo.....rwa nyina.....rwi-cama....ona....rwi....rwa....ngui
Breast.....of mother.....is sweet....even....ifa dogs*

*Kiswahili naazimu,.....sifayo.....iliyofumbwa,
Githweri nindatuawega..... waku muhithe
Kiswahili I have decided wellness yours hidden*

*Kwa wasiokufahamu,..... niimbe ilivyo kubwa,
Kuri matarakuririkana,.....nguina uria wi munene
To those not remember you sing how it is big*

*Toka..... kama mlizamu,....funika....palipozibwa,
Umatari mukiha kunika kuria kuhithe*

Come like.....veinclose/undo where it is covered
 Titile.....mama.....litamu ,Jingine..... halishihamu.
 Runyondo rwa nyina rwi murio rungi rutininaga thuti
 Breast of mother.....is sweetanother does not finish desire

Lugha yanguyautoto,.....hata sasa nimekua,
 Ruthiomirwakwa ndimwana ona riu ndimukuru
 Language.....mine.....ofchildeven now I am old

Tangu ulimi mzito, sasa kusema najua,
 Kuma rurimi ruritu riu kwaria ni njui
 Since tongue heavy now speak I know

Ni sawa na manukato, moyoni mwangu na pua,
 Ni undu umwe/nangoroini yakwa na maniuru
 Same as..... perfumeheart in mine and nose

Pori baharina mto,napita nikitumia,
 Weruini..... kana maini,niingaga.....ngikuhuthira
 In the wilderness or ocean I crossusing you

Titile mama..... litamu,..... jingine halishi hamu.
 Runyondo rwa nyina.....rwi.....murio..... rungirutininaga hamu
 Mothersbreast.....issweetanother.....does not finish longing

A Dream Deferred - Mwihoko Wa Gwitiririo

What happens to a dream deferred?
 Nikii gikikaga kwi kiroto/mwihoko murarie/mwitiririi

Does it dry up
 Ni kumauumaga

like a raisin in the sun?
 ta thabibu riuaini?

Or fester like a sore—
 Kana ni kuhoha ta kironda

And then run?
 Arabu gigateng'era?

Does it stink like rotten meat?
Kana gitararikaga ta nyama mbuthu?

Or crust and sugar over—
Kana kiumaga kuma

like a syrupy sweet?
Ta ngogoyo nduru

Maybe it just sags
Kana kihohaga

like a heavy load.
Ta murigo muritu

Or does it explode?
Kana ni gituthukaga?

- translations by author

CHAPTER SEVEN

African Languages as Key to African Identity

Mwenda Mukuthuria

Introduction

It is a known fact that languages are key to any people's identity. However, in as much as this is a universal truth, African languages have not been given prominence in the African setting to play this major role effectively. Immediately after African states gained independence, there were signs of realizing the potential of African languages. This was because the freedom fighters had African languages at heart. However, today, foreign languages are at the center stage. They are exalted by African scholars and institutions of higher learning at the expense of African languages which have been ignored. The consequences are enormous, including the current underdevelopment of some African languages and the extinction of others. Therefore, this chapter is a modest attempt to re-examine and recommend positive measures which could reduce the negative identity of African languages in order to forge new impetus of elevating African languages as a marker of African identity.

African identity can be viewed as the sum total of all aspects of life that when put together can be used to give Africa a uniqueness in the universe that is a composition of very many races. The identity of any community can be inherited or the community can evolve and reshape its identity. In this respect, among the human heritage of identity is language. While underscoring this fact, Mulokozi (2000:72) observes that language is fundamental to people's identity (cf. Nsibambi, 2000: vii). Therefore, in as much as language can be determined by the environment, it stands as a beacon of identity, cutting across all classes of people and nationalities.

Africa is a continent of diversity, and in terms of language endowment it is estimated that it has over 2000 languages. East Africa alone has got approximately 239 living languages.¹ However, the traumatic experience with colonizers in the early 19th and 20th centuries left big scars of

demonization on African languages, a ghost which has continued haunting Africans for many years after independence. Immediately the colonizers left Africa, the culture of aping invaded the continent. The pride that Africans had of their local African languages was no more. Emphasis was put on the colonizers language, which were used for imparting literacy skills. Besides, these foreign languages were seen as the sole link between administrators/colonizers in terms of recruiting labour and later in the postcolonial African countries they were seen as ladder to white color jobs and an avenue of acquiring Western technology through education. All these factors were the impetus that led to the stagnation of most African languages. Among the issues to be interrogated here are the reasons why African languages are not given the prominence they deserve in the same way as they did during the struggle for independence; the reason why their role as sources of identity is not taken seriously, and, above all, what can be done to bring back the appreciation of our languages in view of the fact that it is an anomaly for a people to downplay their languages.

Language as Key to a People's Identity

As it has already been mentioned, languages are key to identity. Although languages are subsets of cultures, their common practice makes them to be more overt than the cultures which breed them. Indeed, it is possible to lose other aspects of culture and yet retain a language; however, the vice versa is not true. This is because culture uses a language not only to reinvent itself for the purpose of dynamism but also to sustain continuity for posterity. It is out of this that languages have been used to identify communities, nations and even empires. The evidence to this dates back to the ancient world. For example, the Greek empire was identified by the common use of the Greek language, which was one time a *lingua franca* from Turkey to Portugal (Trudgill, 1974:58). Later when the empire changed hands and the Romans came to power, the Latin language was imposed on the region. This same is the case all over the world. As a result of colonialism in Africa, today we have Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone Africa. These linguistic blocks came into existence because the colonizers were not discriminative in enforcing their languages to Africans across the expansive areas which were under their control. All this was motivated by a simple fact known to them very well: that the power of the language unify and galvanize support, enslave, and above

all serve as a tool of exploitation of resources and socio-political networking.

When a language is used as a means to achieve development, its importance in the society is tangible; therefore, the levels of development reached by a given community can indirectly identify that linguistic group to the entire world. This view is justified by Mohochi (2005) when he argues that for Africa to maintain its identity and attain meaningful development, African nations must use their languages. It should be remembered that levels of development reflect cultural advancement in all facets of life. Hence, it should be borne in mind that contribution of the language to the identity is not only its name and its use for the purpose of communication, but also its indirect role of improving the sum total of their ways of life.

The development of a language to embrace the role of communication in any society means enhancement of culture, a fact which cannot be written off in history. This is the view supported by Abdalla (1984) when he states that third world countries must see development as being first of all based on the assertion of their cultural identity. This means you do not have to do away with your cultural heritage and reinvent a new culture based on another community culture. By so doing, the identity will be lost. Our attempts to develop as a country or as a people need to be balanced as Mohochi (2005:3) points out by the need for the African communities maintaining their cultural heritages by striving to develop without complete westernization. Basically, cultural identity affects peoples values, tastes, skills and ideas (Mohochi, 2005:6). Loss of a language can lead to cultural alienation, loss of creativity and consequently retardation in development. It is at this point where Sapir – Whorf ideas of language affecting our world view becomes pertinent in terms of development and identity. In Africa today, it is evident that under exploitation of indigenous knowledge has lead to ignorance of Africans being solely dependent on the technology from the west. This attitude is there to stay; more so, in this era of globalization. Nevertheless, in the advent of the initiatives to develop the regional blocks like the East African Federation, it is anticipated that sensitivity in conserving cultural heritage like languages will be considered for identity. It is expected that regional governments will spell policies to protect and develop these languages and, no doubt, if this happens progress and development will be achieved.

The Origins of the Quest for African Identity

The self awakening and quest for African identity can arguably be traced back to the early 19th century when crusaders of anti-slavery, in the course of their 'philanthropic' roles, started enlightening freed African slaves on their rights and the need to preserve their identity. Of course, sincerity was lacking in this crusade of preserving African identity because racial discrimination was propagated through non-interaction of races. Later, anti-imperialist pan-Africanism took the mantle in earnest, inspired by Sylvester Williams, Marcus Garvey, William E.B. Du Bois and other black Americans and Caribbeans (Oloruntimehin, 1985). After the First World War, African nationalism which liberated many African nations from European colonialism was motivated by the anti-imperialist movement. Among other things, the African freedom fighters, the great men and women of vision, had taken cognizance that language is a strong tool of mobilization, particularly during the struggle for independence. This time, African languages were respected regardless of their diversity. The evidence to this was the fact that these freedom fighters could use their African mother tongues to write all forms of literature. African mother tongues were seen as key to regaining African identity, which had been eroded by colonizers. However, this spell did not last long. Soon after independence, African languages were seen as a burden, uncultured and unfit for the so called modern education. Therefore, the period after independence marked a retreat and since then there has not been any effort to take an uphill task of developing African languages. Instead, independent African governments have found solace in the use of foreign languages in the system of education and even as national languages. This is because the mother countries of these languages have always contributed generously to sustain their languages.² When all this is done, the daunting task of developing the African languages is shelved due to cost considerations.

Similarly, African scholars, in conspiracy with the elites in the government, have selfishly guarded the interests of the colonial masters since the advent of independence. Their interests have been to have their children get the best education that there is in the West using foreign languages. In this case, hostile attitudes of the elites has devalued the African languages in the system of education as it has been observed by Fabunmi and Salawu (2005). Therefore, even in cases where the key leaders

have tried to turn around the situation, as is the case in Tanzania, the going has not been easy. For example, Mwalimu Nyerere tried to develop Kiswahili to be used in all facets of life, especially after the Arusha Declaration of 1967. However, his long struggle never rewarded him with the legalization of the status of 'official language' that he had bestowed on Kiswahili. The result is that, even today Tanzania is tagged by the dubious reputation of using Kiswahili as an official language without a backing legislation. To make the matter worse, this African language, which is growing in importance in the East African Community, is yet to be declared by Kenya and other members of the Community as the legal official language. It is only Uganda which has declared it as a second official language through an act of parliament (Mukuthuria, 2006:163).

Independent Governments and African Languages

For any language to develop there is need for a systematic approach. This kind of approach can only be provided in the National Language Policy. According to Gorman (1974:397), "Language policy... refers to decisions taken by bodies with administrative and juridical responsibilities of such a nature that decisions affected procedures and practice at the level of national organization in a country." It is sad to note that many African countries, including Kenya, lack a clearly defined language policy to provide guidance on the development of all languages. As is the case in Kenya, education policy has been used in most countries to interpret the course of developing local African languages. Hence if the education policy is grossly ignored in some aspect, as the case is in Kenya with regard to language of instruction in lower primary classes, then the consequences are disastrous. For example, minority ethnic groups like the Ogiek have been forced to use bigger ethnic languages like Kiswahili, Gikuyu or Kipsigis depending on their location in lower primary school. Bearing in mind that Ogiek is an endangered language because of the fact that it is used by a minority group, of less than 5000 people (see Sang, 2002), this kind of act not only contravenes UNESCO Article 4 of Cultural Diversity and Human Rights in the Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity but also it is a sure way of facing out the language in question from the face of the earth. This is a predicament which is facing not only the Ogiek language in Kenya but also Yaaku and others (see Heine and Mohlig, 1980). In this case it is

puzzling why a responsible government should preside over the death of a language.

African Governments have not initiated research nor have they established foundations to research and preserve African languages. Most African scholars interested in African languages rely on funding from bodies outside Africa to carry out any research on African languages (UNESCO, 2004). In this case, one wonders who is supposed to be spearheading this responsibility. In all, it has become typical of African governments to consider development of African languages inconsequential. Probably as of now, the only government which should be lauded with regard to developing African languages is South Africa, where all African languages are being developed.

African Universities Contribution to the Underdevelopment of African Languages

Basically, national institutions are a reflection of the policies of their mother governments. Therefore, in a situation where there is no national language policy in place, institutions like universities, which are supposed to research and teach languages at advanced levels may lack clear guidelines on how to develop languages in a given country. This is the fate that has befallen most African universities. This scenario is captured in a Kenya Times newspaper article (dated 10th July 2006) by Don Osborn entitled “Universities Accused of Killing African Languages”:

Obsession with foreign languages as well as inadequate reference materials on African mother tongues has undermined the development of African languages. The investment, use and promotion of African languages in tertiary institutions as well as the universities has been overemphasized at the expense of Africa’s diverse mother tongue...

This article has captured the reality of matters on the ground. For example, in Kenya and Tanzania, the most popular African language which is instructed at the university level is Kiswahili. Other languages are yet to be elevated to this state. It is only in Uganda where over 10 local languages are instructed at university level in the Institute of Languages, Makerere University. However, it should be noted that the intention of instructing these languages at university level has nothing to do with adopting them for wider communication as is the case in South Africa. This leaves many

African languages in the East African region faced with extinction because nobody has even attempted to research their sound inventory; and they have no basic orthography or grammar books in place for reference. Therefore, a lot needs to be done by African universities to arrest this situation, promote African languages and, above all, preserve them for the sake of posterity and African identity.

Could African Languages add any Value to Africa if Developed?

The resounding truth is yes! African languages can be very effective in communication. Currently, the foreign languages used by African countries in the media are not understood by the masses, and this is a blow to development because of the communication gap. Government policies may not efficiently reach the citizenry, and diffusion of technology in all aspects of life may not be achieved with ease. Above all, high levels of illiteracy may never be eradicated, and consequently, poverty and underdevelopment will always live to be a tag of most African nations. Had African countries developed African languages, the objective of achieving Millennium Development Goals, which are giving many African countries nightmares, could not be the uphill task as it is today.

The development of African languages can promote general literacy in Africa as a whole. It is important to note that the culture of reading has not gained root in Africa because of high levels of illiteracy. Had governments developed these languages, probably the problem of reading materials could not be an issue. As of now, there is no publisher who can venture to develop reading materials for languages that are not defined in any language policy.

Although it has been argued from some quarters that developing African languages may cultivate ethnic animosity (cf. Mazrui and Mazrui, 1985; Mazrui and Mazrui, 1998; Mugambi 2004), this may not be true always. Indeed, the ability to tolerate and live with diversity is fundamental to democracy.

In addition, the development of these languages means that a lot of African talents are going to be tapped and thereby bringing out the uniqueness of Africa. It should be borne in mind that some problems of poverty that African countries are facing today have their roots in the inability to tap talent. Tapping of talent goes alongside with creating

employment and improving of the standards of living. Above all, developing African languages means not only protecting the diversity of African languages but also protecting of our diverse culture and biodiversity. Languages are archives of culture, and once they are safeguarded, they can be profoundly enriching.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing discussion, it is clear that although the clamor for African identity appears to be riding on the crest of independent African states, there is no conspicuous achievement that has been made in developing African languages. It is clear that African languages were regarded highly by Africans in the post-independence days because of the role that they played to galvanize Africans against their colonial masters. After independence, it turned out to be a case of 'crossing the river and cutting the bridge.' The tempo of valuing these African languages has not been sustained. This is evidenced by lack of national language policies, in many African countries, a problem which is bedeviling the function of African languages as a beacon of African identity.

It is the right of every human being to be identified with his language. Also, it is the right of every human being to speak and to be listened in the language that he or she understands best. The question of whether one is cultured in the style of Western education or any other system of education should not be an issue. African nations should strive to satisfy this quest by developing the African languages and giving them prominence in key domains to enhance their citizenry participation in the development through creativity and general dissemination of indigenous knowledge to the rest of the world for the betterment of humanity.

There is no doubt that well defined policies with regard to African languages can make people to appreciate their languages and motivate learners to find sense in learning their own languages. Well articulated policies will also promote the status of African languages in society. As they stand now, their status is low and they are demonized as languages of the poor and uneducated. Above all, they are seen as languages which cannot offer anything in socio-economic mobility (cf. Mohochi, 2005:13).

Consequently, we are recommending the following:

- o That African nations should be at the forefront of developing African languages for posterity; otherwise, they will be judged harshly by the generations to come for being the cause of the extinction of Africa's heritage of diverse languages. This should be taken with a lot of seriousness, more so in this age of advanced technology. Most languages that will fall short of embracing modern technology because of their low levels of underdevelopment no doubt will be the first ones to face extinction (Chimerah, 1999). This feat can be achieved by starting from the basics of defining language policies and the overseeing of the implementation of those policies to the letter. Besides, African government should not rely solely on outside funding to develop their own languages. In as much as funding from outside should be appreciated, it should not incapacitate the idea of setting up homegrown Foundations where Africans can contribute generously to the preservation of their heritage of languages.
- o Languages should be developed within institutions of learning. This means that African languages taught at the university level should be increased. Those others which may not be easy to teach at the university level can be taught up to a given level of education depending on the materials and resources available. With time they can be instructed at higher levels.
- o Local African languages should be used for instruction and the government should take the initiative to develop required materials.
- o Research is the answer to most of the preservation problems. This one can start off in higher institutions of learning by encouraging post-graduate students to document African languages faced with extinction. Data banks can be set up to generate simple lexicon and grammar books to be used by the lower levels to resuscitate the dying languages.

African countries using foreign languages should feel lacking in cultural identity in the sense that they are alienating themselves through foreign cultures. They should be ready to take the slightest opportunity to have a language that can express their cultural diversity and consequently to address the needs of the majority, who do not speak, read or understand the Western languages in use today. And to sum it all, as Mulokozi (2000:75) observes, "...using foreign language as your official language is the surest

way to erode your identity not to mention your respect as a nation.” It is clear the quest of developing indigenous African languages for the sake of African identity is a matter not only of preservation but also of our pride as Africans.

Notes

¹ See *Global Advice Newsletter*- http://intersolink.com/newsletters/newsletter_archives.html or *Languages of Africa* –<http://www.ethnologue.com>

² This scenario is not only a common feature in the development of African languages. Thairu (2003:37) has generally observed that Africans and African leaders have tended to look at African problems from outside when it comes to matters central to their survival. In this regard he has blamed African leaders specifically for treating, for example, the HIV/AIDS issue as basically a donor issue even though it is endangering their geo-political interests.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Kiswahili: The Language of National and Regional Integration

Kimani Njogu

The 2008 post-election violence in Kenya challenged in fundamental ways the country's national identity. As a geographical space, the nation-state was put in jeopardy and risked fragmentation. Young people, angry and disappointed at the declaration of contested presidential results by the Electoral Commission of Kenya, suddenly rose against their neighbors who had exercised their constitutional right to vote for a candidate of their choice. The fundamental right to life was temporarily suspended in certain parts of the country in the pursuit of electoral justice. Inter-ethnic social relations in marriage, family and friendship were threatened as new alliances pegged on ethno-linguistic affiliations were sought. Individuals who had worked towards a national consciousness were challenged by the nature of the dominant tensions and some resorted to ethnic particularities and mapping. Children who were born in urban areas and those from interethnic marriages were required to redefine their identities.

The post-election violence took an ethnic dimension because, among other factors, political organizing in most of Africa is driven by ethnic, clan, and personal loyalties. It may indeed be claimed that ethnic mobilization coupled with poor leadership, unequal resource allocation and poverty is a major cause of intra-state conflicts in Africa. As a structure for the definition and interaction of sub-national power groups making up the national polity, ethnicity is a potent force in Africa and when juxtaposed with socio-economic deprivation, political manipulation, unemployment among the youth, the hunger for political power among the elite, the availability of small arms and an ineffectual security system it can be extensively used to gain, consolidate and maintain power. Ethnic solidarity and a dominant discourse of 'difference' and 'exclusion' can lead to an inability to see other forms of identity within the social structure and be immensely conflictive. Perceptions of inequitable access to resources

and the fear or marginalization from power cited often as basis for conflict – are generally more pronounced among ethnic communities than across them. The “big men” in ethnic communities lead a life exceedingly dissimilar to that of their followers and have a patron-client relationship with them. To camouflage their relative advantage, however, they invoke negative ethnicity. In doing so, ethno-nationalists demand the recognition of ethnic groups, each with separate representation in the legislature and executive, territorial autonomy, personal or religious law, and proportionality in public affairs. This is contrast to the more integrative approach which recognizes ethnic diversity and the right of all to be treated equally. The approach recognizes that the separatism reinforces ethnic divisions, privilege the elite of ethnic communities and undermine the rights of individuals. Ethnic difference becomes a locus of mistrust and hate.

Yet ethnicity, often manifested through language, could also be a resource; a rich convergence of diversity within the nation-state. This richness in diversity can be managed in Kenya in a useful manner through a consolidation of humanist and democratic values, pride in citizenship and the upholding of the concept of freedom of expression as enshrined in international conventions and statutes. It could also be supported in significant ways by a deliberate cultivation of a common ground defined through shared territoriality and the use of a national language, such as Kiswahili. The national language then becomes the tool for national consciousness and integration. It would reduce strong ethnic loyalties and cultivate a sense of inter-ethnic oneness and mutual respect. The supra-ethnic language need not lead to a devaluation of other local languages; it would be another layer of consciousness dialogically linked to other forms of national expression. It is quite evident that there are sub-national forces challenging nations and communities and are demanding to have some of the rights and cultural visibility ordinarily located in the nation-state. We ought to heed these forces even as we work towards national integration, through Kiswahili and a generation of national leaders. The national language will be the carrier of shared inter-ethnic values, such as integrity (*uadilifu*), respect (*heshima*), discipline (*nidhamu*) and trust (*uaminifu*). But for this to happen, the elevation of the national language ought to be factored deliberately into all aspects of development – political, economic, social, cultural and technological - and Kiswahili scholars should

play the role of guiding the nation towards this end. Crucially, inter-ethnic tensions are exacerbated by local and national leaders and much work on improving the quality of leadership should be undertaken. However, language could also be used in the cultivation of social and cultural proximity.

Although the language is used widely by citizens, Kiswahili as a tool for national integration in Kenya has not been sufficiently appreciated. The political elite have paid little attention to the fact that the language could contribute in the creation of a national consciousness and identity. Though used for political mobilization and a range of economic activities, especially within the informal sector and public service, there has been very little investment by the government and the private sector in promoting it. No sustainable support is given by government to Kiswahili professional and lobby groups and therefore there is no institutionalization of efforts to nurture and promote this regional *lingua franca*. Whereas there is recognition that the spirit of nationhood needs to be revamped, there is no sufficient commitment by public and private institutions to create space for Kiswahili to play its role as the language of national cohesion and integration.

Yet it is virtually impossible to build the national spirit and consciousness without a language of inter-ethnic vision and emotion. Kenya can seize the moment of national healing and reconciliation to emphasize unambiguously the place of Kiswahili in nation building. By coming up with a clear policy on the national language and systems for its implementation, Kenya can begin to transition from strong ethnic fixation to inter-ethnic and nationalistic convergences. Other forms of identities would start taking precedence over ethnic solidarity and the political elite would have to be more creative in dealing with their ethnic-based supporters. Equally, voters would demand more from leaders and political engagement would be significantly issue-driven. The media would be required to show that the polarization of the nation along ethnic lines is narrow and retrogressive. The national language would be deliberately marshaled to build tolerance, trust and harmony among communities. It would play a useful political, economic, social and cultural role in bringing about national integration. Resources would be put aside for the development of the national language and other indigenous languages would support the national agenda, instead of undermining it. But for

this to happen, leaders would need to liberate themselves from the shackles of greed for power, self aggrandizement and neo-colonial interests, including in matters of language and social development. Our advocacy for Kiswahili as a language for national and regional integration should not be seen as a struggle against other local languages. Kiswahili will be the richer if other indigenous languages are also given weight and simultaneously imbued with a nationalistic content and worldview so that the relationship between the local and the national is dialogic and mutually enriching. Moreover, from a human rights perspective, it is the right of all people to freely express themselves in the language of their choice and the state is obligated to help them do so. In this chapter, I discuss the role that Kiswahili and other African languages can play in national integration by examining their political, technological, educational and social contexts.

The Political Arena

The colonial governments had two major considerations in determining their language policies in Africa: language as a vehicle for cultural transmission, and language as a carrier of knowledge, at times subversive to the *status quo*. The colonial government recognized that language can be used to transmit a content that could transform and the consciousness of the colonized so that it consents and supports the colonial status quo. Equally, language as a bearer of knowledge could imbue the African with counter-consciousness dangerous to the very survival of colonialism (Mazrui 1988: 22). Language could be used in a liberative project that could undermine colonial domination.

Thus the British colonial government attempted to create a balance between these considerations by allowing Kenyans limited access to the English language; the critical factor being the extent to which the language served the interests of the colonial government. African languages continued to play a peripheral role in the affairs of government, and education, except in cases where urbanization, militarization, and commercialization brought together people from a range of ethno-linguistic groups. In such cases, languages such as Kiswahili created a place for themselves as *lingua franca*. But in general African languages continued to be marginalized and to serve as indicators of low socio-economic status, with English marking itself as the language of prestige, high status and

upward socio-economic mobility. A disconnect between content carried by local languages and that of English and Kiswahili emerged: English was viewed as the language of generating and transmitting international and national knowledge and African languages were seen as instruments of cultural expression at the local level. Restricted in their use, local languages became tools for ethnic solidarity and fixation. During the liberation struggle, Kiswahili was used by Kenyan nationalists to reach out across ethnic groups and to subvert the colonial agenda of ethnic stereotyping and divisiveness. After independence, the role of Kiswahili as the language of inter-ethnic solidarity at the political arena declined because the colonial state was not dismantled and with rural-urban migration African languages were de-emphasized, especially by the emerging middle-class. Instruments of power and the psychology that was dominant at the colonial period found continuity on the attainment of political independence. There was no expression of linguistic nationalism.

Indeed whereas there has been a strong sense of linguistic nationalism in Asian countries, the same cannot be said of many African countries (Mazrui and Tidy 1984: 299; Mazrui and Mazrui 1998:154). In certain cases, the push has been for the acquisition of more Western languages, especially among the middle-class. But there have been significant moments in East Africa when nationalists have urged that the central role occupied by English be re-considered. For example, immediately after Kenya became a Republic (1964) Prime Minister Mzee Jomo Kenyatta delivered his speech to the first parliament in English and then concluded by speaking in Kiswahili after declaring English "a colonialistic language." He urged that the country releases itself from linguistic chains by adopting Kiswahili as the nation's official language (Republic of Kenya, 1965: column 8). In all his public speeches Kenyatta spoke in Kiswahili, even if briefly. In 1974 he declared it a national language, as well as the language of parliamentary proceedings. Unfortunately, this declaration did not receive enough support from the political elite and English was in case the language of status and prestige. Moreover, despite these nationalistic proclamations, motions debated in Kiswahili ended up in bills written in English because the language of the judiciary remains English. The executive, the legislature and the judiciary did not harmonise the vision of Kiswahili as the language of national cohesion and popular participation

in public affairs. No real energies were expended to promote African languages, including Kiswahili in educational institutions by the Kenyatta government. It was left to the Presidential Working Party appointed in 1981 and adopted by the government in 1984 to have Kiswahili recognized as a tool for national development. The party noted that “Although Kiswahili is the national language, there are many university graduates who cannot communicate in Kiswahili” (p. 443). Thereafter, the educational system in Kenya changed in order to follow the American system: 8 years of primary education, 4 years of secondary education and 4 years of university education.

The entry of 8:4:4 system of education made Kiswahili a compulsory and examinable subject in all schools in the mid-1980s. This action has ensured that the youth in Kenya get a strong mastery of the language, to the extent that the language is now likely to be an official language, together with English and sign language, in addition to its role as the language of national identity and cohesion. All public universities now encourage post-graduate students from Kiswahili Departments to write their dissertations in Kiswahili, and a number of theoretically rigorous studies are currently undertaken in the language. More work needs to be done to consciously bring Kiswahili into professional organizations and training institutions, such as the Kenya School of Law and the Kenya Medical School. The inclusion of Kiswahili as a service course in these institutions will help professionals serve the public more effectively. The course could be designed as a PASS/FAIL unit and professionals required to pass before they can serve the public. At another level, politicians would be required to show proficiency at a higher level that is currently the case. These actions would ensure that the language gains the status and prestige it deserves as and the national and regional *lingua franca*.

Unlike Kenya, Tanzania has done much to anchor Kiswahili in national affairs through political action and the setting up of institutions for the development of the language. Between 1940 and 1961, English was the dominant language of Tanganyika in the educational system. The medium of instruction in rural primary schools was Kiswahili during the first five years. But after those initial years all subjects, except Kiswahili, were taught in English. English was taught as a subject from the third year of primary education and was a medium of instruction in many urban schools. But Mwalimu Julius Nyerere in consolidating the nation-state entrenched

Kiswahili in the national psyche. At independence in 1961, Kiswahili became the national language and the tool for interethnic unity. With the 1967 Arusha Declaration and the introduction of Education for Self-Reliance, a linguistic shift became eminent. Primary education was supposed to be complete by itself and to prepare the youth for life and Kiswahili would be the tool to deliver this goal. Consequently, in May 1967, soon after the inauguration of Education for Self-Reliance, Kiswahili was officially declared the medium of instruction in all primary schools in mainland Tanzania, except in selected private schools in Dar-es-Salaam. Through the publication of books to meet curriculum needs, translation of existing materials, writing of dictionaries and supplementary texts, the language was given the opportunity to flourish. Until now, it is the medium of instruction in all government primary schools. Language instruments such as the National Kiswahili Council (BAKITA) and the Institute of Kiswahili Research (IKR) at the University of Dar-es-Salaam are contributing in the standardization of Kiswahili and the expansion of its lexicon. But the language is also developing at the expense of other Tanzanian languages and the phenomenon of language loss is real. Moreover, certain segments of the leadership in Tanzania are pushing for the reintroduction of English as a medium of instruction in all schools. In the recent past, a few private schools have started using English as the medium of instruction in the belief that doing so will open up opportunities for Tanzanians which are currently denied them through emphasizing Kiswahili in the education system. The earlier dream of making Kiswahili the only medium of instruction at all levels of education in Tanzania seems to be waning and may require a new push by language activists in the region. Tanzania might want to consider improving the teaching of English as a language for purposes of interaction but it would be a tragedy if it forfeited the use of Kiswahili. It is vital that Swahiliphone Africa consolidates the regional language so that it can guide the rest of the continent. The balancing and consolidation would need to start at the national level.

In my view, the main linguistic challenge facing African countries today is how to develop a language policy that would both accommodate languages inherited from the colonial experience, such as English and French, while at the same time creating an important space for the development and promotion of indigenous languages, such as Kiswahili.

Colonialism presented two scenarios for Africa vis-à-vis the language question: Whereas the British system of indirect rule made use of traditional systems of knowledge and governance, whenever possible, by making local languages important for the colonial administrator, the French policy of assimilation gave very little regard to indigenous languages, prioritizing instead the French language and culture. The British colonial regimes introduced English, even if to a limited degree, but allowed at least in the initial stages, the growth of indigenous languages. This is not to suggest, of course, that British colonialism had an interest in developing African languages *per se*. The support was provided only to the extent that they served colonial interests. Towards the end of the colonial era, the British government in the colonies seems to have accelerated the use of English among the people as a way of preparing the local elite to take over and to perpetuate and protect British interests.

The presence of languages that are in competition with each other in Africa – with some occupying a more prestigious and powerful space than others – creates a situation of tension and contestation. But would the tensions lead to a deliberate erasure of some languages and a reinscription of others? I see the questioning we are engaged in as an attempt to allow for the co-existence of multiple languages but with a rigorous effort to develop African languages in their various forms and manifestations following the 2000 Asmara Declaration. At the center of these initiatives would be, of course, the development of national and regional languages. Linguistic diversity as a way of maintaining biological and environmental diversity is the most viable for Africa. In addition, the promotion and development of African languages is a necessary prerequisite to political, economic, social and cultural emancipation. Indigenous language development is part of the decolonization of the African continent in all domains of life; a position that has been articulated consistently in the CHAKITA-Kenya (Kiswahili Language Association) annual meetings and position papers.

There are, naturally, pedagogical and instrumental constraints and facilitations to the proposal of anchoring African languages; some of which may be located in the colonial experience as well as the phenomenon of globalization, information technology and economic constraints. Considering the limited resources in Africa, for instance, how can we

pointedly develop a set of regional languages while keeping linguistic diversity alive? An important starting point in the case of East African countries is the unambiguous, deliberate and rigorous development of Kiswahili at the national and regional level.

It is broadly recognized that a key feature of Eastern African countries is their triglossic nature; a consequence of the colonial encounter, sketched above, which also assigned prestige and status to the acquisition of foreign languages and deliberately discouraged the teaching and learning of African languages, except for evangelical purposes and basic functions of interpersonal communication. Although most missionary work was undertaken in indigenous languages, the colonial government did occasionally seek to suppress this process of Christianization. And that did not just happen in East Africa. When German missionaries arrived in Cameroon at the onset of the German colonial period they used local languages for education and evangelization. However, in 1897 the colonial administration put a ban on the use of indigenous languages in schools. Only the German language was to be used for teaching and learning. Moreover, in 1900 the '*Schutzgebietgesetz*' law gave missionaries the right to only carry out their evangelization mission in local languages. Despite these prohibitions, indigenous languages continued to play a critical role in evangelization – through translation of the Bible, hymns and other religious texts – as well as in popular communication in homes, cultural production, commercial activities and so on.

But as the reins of power changed hands at independence, one would have expected that there would be a reversal of the language policy and practice and that indigenous and national languages would receive greater emphasis and visibility in governance, law, economic engagement and education. This is especially so because schools and other spaces where education takes place are prime arenas for language reclamation. But that was not to be, at least in Kenya. In Kenya, the national language and other indigenous forms of expression have not received sufficient attention and have continued to play a marginal role in national affairs and educational institutions. Moreover, they are not deliberately developed and promoted. Indeed, because of the uneven relations between languages, certain indigenous languages are in jeopardy and are in danger of being lost especially within the context of ethno-linguistic expansion, technologization and homogenization.

Although globalization – a process of cultural interconnectedness, homogeneity, integration, and disintegration – is contributing to language loss, there are other factors that might also accelerate to the loss of some Kenyan languages, such as Suba, Ogiek, Il Chamus and El Molo. One factor is that languages which do not have a systematic and vibrant writing and reading tradition and which rely heavily on orality, are likely to die out if one generation fails to learn them. Current generations are not learning, reading or working in the languages of their parents. Hence the urgent need to carry out descriptive and sociolinguistic action on all languages, as well as linguistic classifications, including distribution patterns, standardized orthography, and the development of dictionaries and printed materials. There is need to develop reading materials for children in local languages. Also, within the context of language loss, Kenyan linguists are urging the government to rigorously and consistently support the development of indigenous languages and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage has set up language departments and committees in all districts in the country (Director of Culture, July 29, 2008, personal communication). The pace with which these departments work will, of course, depend on the conviction of the relevant officers as well as the articulation of the value attached to knowing indigenous languages well and the opportunities presented for learning them. Whatever the case, in most urban areas, Kiswahili can be foregrounded as the language of social and economic activity and contribute in inter-ethnic understanding. It is indeed already fulfilling this role but that function can be strengthened and focused. The language can be an engine of national development, the eradication of poverty and contribute in food security.

Currently, 57% of Kenyans live below the poverty line but by addressing issues of language we may change this pattern. In my view, Kenya's failure to address the language question in national development, consistently and deliberately, has contributed in the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor and this glaring difference played a role in the 2008 post election violence. Increased school drop-out and transition rates, rising poverty and socio-economic inequities, and unemployment demand of us to think creatively about imparting relevant knowledge and skills in the languages available to the bulk of the people. Most school leavers operate within the nation-state, and not internationally, and greater proficiency in a national language would make them more productive

than is currently the case. With Kiswahili as a regional lingua franca, citizens will easily cross borders and undertake economic activities without regard to levels of formal education.

Africa is endowed with abundant natural resources. However, the continent's future economic growth will depend mainly on its labour skills and its ability to accelerate a demographic transition. Also, the continent will require to invest in people in order to promote their individual development. In order to achieve these, we need education, health, flexibility and a certain amount of economic security. But in the context of HIV and AIDS, war and conflict, drought, urbanization, unemployment, and massive poverty, the situation does look grim. Yet by focusing on protection against vulnerability, Africa can solve its crisis (World Bank, 2000: 103) and language can play a major role towards this end. In view of the dismal levels of literacy, it is becoming quite important to explore if using African languages, such as Kiswahili, as engines of development can help solve the problem. They might open possibilities for the bulk of the people to be engaged in productive labour, and participate in politics and economic activities. Regional languages, such as Kiswahili, Zulu and Hausa, could be used to bolster cross-border trade, widen access to services especially for the rural people and increase community involvement in construction, maintenance and management of the infrastructure. Indeed, water systems in Kenya "built as part of self-help efforts proved far more reliable than those installed by the Water Ministry" (World Bank Human Development Report, 2000:152). The medium of the self-help efforts, made possible through the Harambee movement for social change, was indigenous languages. They were used for mobilization, mass participation, and the creation of a sense of identity and solidarity.

The link between languages and cultures on development cannot be ignored. This is because language is more than a means for the transmission of information. It is also a tool for creativity, innovation, affinity and solidarity. Kwesi Prah (2002: 35) considers the language of the masses the vehicle for undertaking development. By using a language such as Kiswahili, we increase public participation, facilitate affirmative action, broaden decision making processes, build on indigenous language systems and ensure Africans are enlisted for African development. Thus within the context of seeking a path to greater development for the Kenyan

people by enlarging avenues for working directly with communities, African languages can be emphasized and modernized as engines of development. Development workers cannot effectively work through interpreters when in the rural areas. Instead, many of them are learning local languages in order to engage in meaningful communication.

There is no doubt that Africa is undergoing tremendous changes at the political level. A range of opportunities are now available for popular participation in politics, accountability of leaders, openness and transparency in the conduct of national affairs, and the pursuit of justice and fairness for all. These democracy markers are opening new possibilities for African languages. In pursuing national integration across ethnic lines and between socio-economic classes, indigenous languages are being sought and their functions expanded. Politicians would like to engage in intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic dialogue with the electorate without recourse to interpretation which can be quite alienating. Tanzania is a good example of how the challenge of national integration and unity could be resolved. By centralizing Kiswahili as the language of political action, the Tanzanian people have ensured broad public participation in national affairs. The country has one of the most politically informed citizenry in the region with a vibrant media and diverse outlets for news and information in Kiswahili.

The realignment of language practices are also influenced by economic factors which are equally important for the consolidation of democracy. Indigenous languages can be key to enhancing local and national markets, mobilizing workers and peasants, disseminating information on basic rights that have a bearing on production and providing economic solutions that challenge the phenomenon of dependence on the West. Thus, as African nations seek to delink themselves from the fetters of cultural and economic dependence they are likely to entrench certain African languages. For instance, the African Union passed a resolution making Kiswahili one of the organic official languages in July 2002 and it was implemented at the General Assembly in Addis Ababa in July 2004. The working languages of the African Union are now Arabic, English, French, Kiswahili, Portuguese, Spanish and any other African language. Apparently, the continental body seeks to instill a sense of worth for African languages, here represented by Kiswahili, and to contribute in reshaping language related policies for Africa.

The Arena of Technology

Information Communication Technology is an important context in our understanding of how indigenous languages operate in Kenya. Although internet growth has been fast in Kenya, access is mainly confined to urban centres due to lack of electricity, poor networks, costs of installation and maintenance. But there is a growing interest in kiosks, cyber cafés, hotels, and other sites for public internet access (schools, police stations, clinics). These spaces allow for information sharing, sometimes of linguistic significance. In reality, the greatest challenge for Africa's internet connectivity is not access but content generation. Africa, South of the Sahara, generates 0.4% of global content, and when one factors out South Africa, the rest of the Sub-continent gives only 0.02%. This is truly tragic and ought to be reversed. Kiswahili is one language that can be mobilized to change this state of affairs through deliberate engagement for the generation of content on the internet.

The internet can be used to exchange key information on health, agriculture, business, opportunities for self advancement, and distance learning. Better ICT can create opportunities for people to access their government, through e-governance for instance, increase public participation in politics and improve social services. But for Africa to participate effectively in global information economy, it will need to increase the generation and flow of knowledge. Unfortunately, only a small group of people are involved in this enterprise. Hopefully, with the localization of the keyboard by Linux and Microsoft East Africa a closer engagement between the elite and ordinary citizens may become possible. International media have also been developing Kiswahili and these include Voice of America, BBC, Radio Deustchwelle, Radio Tehran, Radio China International, NHK (Japan), All India Radio and others. The broadcast stations have their broadcasts in Kiswahili available on the internet. Moreover, the ability to develop African languages within the internet is inspiring. This is being done in three ways: first, as medium of interaction between users and the programs; second, as a means of presenting information on the net and third, as topics of discussion. Through the use of African languages on the internet we can reduce the knowledge gap between the elite and the masses.

The growth of communication technology – internet, mobile phones, and satellite networks – have truly compressed time and space. We are

witnessing the emergence of online communities brought together on the internet by convergences of politics, ethnicity, gender, professional duty and shared social concerns. Communities are getting closer to the sources of information and are more informed than a decade ago. The entertainment and media industry are influencing culture and creativity in fundamental ways but we are also experiencing multilingual internet sites and radio programming in local languages. We can develop stronger internet communities of those who use African languages and a Kiswahili internet community is a good place to begin the conversation. Community radio stations have started gaining root and these have the effect of enhancing competence in the language of the broadcast. In Kenya over 80% of households have access to a radio and in the rural areas and the informal settlements around the urban areas most audience members listen to Kiswahili or local language stations. With the push for greater democracy, free market economy and public participation in governance, many African countries have liberalized the airwaves and there is an increase in FM stations which encourage listener interaction through mobile phones and the internet. Whereas some of these stations promote English through programming that targets urban youth, a number especially community radio stations do contribute in the development and promotion of indigenous languages. Local language stations do also make economic sense, especially when they are well targeted. But they should be run professionally and with the consolidation of the nation-state in mind so that ethnic fixation is challenged and questioned. Vernacular stations should be spaces for the celebration of particularities and differences and not aimed at isolation and ethnic stereotyping. Let me elaborate this though further.

The launch of Kameme 101.1 FM (a predominantly Gikuyu station) at the onset of repeal of Section 2A of the Constitution of Kenya allowing multiparty participation in Kenya, led to a resurgence of interest in African cultures generally and the Gikuyu language and culture in particular in Central Kenya. The choice of a station that broadcasts in one's indigenous language results from the need to access information more directly as well as to maintain cultural identity and solidarity. In the pursuit of its mission, Kameme FM sees itself as "identifying with the values and aspirations of the Kenyan people and striving at all times to instill... a sense of patriotism and pride in... culture and national heritage" (Ngumo, 2004). Thus the

station positions itself as the station that speaks to its audience in their own language; and by so doing seeks to bond with its listeners. The station has 62% Gikuyu listeners and 38% non-Gikuyu listeners (Ngumo, 2004). The non-Gikuyu listeners tune into the station for entertainment and are, in the process, learning Gikuyu as they support the station to grow. The station can do much by injecting more programs that build trust, tolerance and respect among communities. It can also increase its Kiswahili programs so that it reduces ethnic fixation by bringing into its studios members of other communities.

Even when they are not fully community based, vernacular radio stations add value to the development and promotion of African languages. They contribute in standardizing language use, expanding the lexicon and increasing mastery. The number of speakers of the language is also increased through on-air-teaching programs. In addition to the usual news and entertainment programmes, Kameme 101.1 FM teaches Gikuyu on its premises. The lessons target members of the Gikuyu community living in Nairobi who do not speak the language well enough, as well as non-Gikuyu speakers interested in learning it for a range of personal and social reasons.

The Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) has programmes in English, Kiswahili and local languages which go on air either from Nairobi or the regional satellite stations. In order to counter the inroads made by Kameme 101.1 FM in central Kenya and the Gikuyu diaspora, other stations such as Coro 99.8 FM (by KBC) and Inooro 98.9 FM (by Royal Media) have been launched. Other stations which broadcast in local languages to a significant degree include Q 94.4 FM (Kiswahili), KASS FM (Kalenjin), Ramogi 107.1 FM (Dholuo), Sayari FM (Kiswahili), Citizen 106.7 FM (Kiswahili), Waumini 88.5 FM (Kiswahili), IQRA FM (Kiswahili), Baraka FM (Kiswahili), and Y-FM (Sheng). These outlets will undoubtedly have an impact on indigenous languages and democratization. Unfortunately, quite often some of the stations have used the space they occupy in the airwaves to balkanize and perpetuate ethnic mistrust, hate and intolerance. It has been claimed that the post-election violence in Kenya can partly be blamed on the propaganda, misinformation and distortions perpetuated by vernacular radio stations. Instead of promoting democratic values, some of the stations retreated to narrow sectarian interests and violated the tenets of journalism through partisan reporting and patronage. They gave fodder to those interested in limiting freedom of expression and those

opposed to the development of local knowledge. Kiswahili stations can provide a lead in the development of nationalistic content and the development of a culture of inter-ethnic tolerance, democracy and human rights. Equally, cultural workers and media practitioners can contribute in professionalizing indigenous language stations so that they uphold ethical programming and the respect of human rights. It will be recalled that the Rwanda genocide was blamed to a significant degree on vernacular stations. It will be appreciated that the centralization of a national language is not a sufficient condition for justice, democracy, peace and human rights. Work must be done to improve the quality of local and national leaders.

The Social Arena

In his essay *“Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom: The Wealth of a Common Global Culture”* Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1993) identifies three traditions from Africa. First is orature such as is encapsulated in oral narratives, performances, *gicandi* poetry (poetic riddling in Gikuyu) and other poetic exchanges. Second is writing in European languages, which arose out of the colonial experience as a method of interrogating the Eurocentric worldview. But according to Ngugi, the writer writing in European languages,

“... has colluded in prosperous uprooting of the African tongue... the African peasant and worker in this literature reappears on the stage of world history speaking not his gabble but perfect English, French or Portuguese, a remarkable case of literary surgery and transplant since in reality the masses of African people do continue speaking and using and creating in African languages.” (1993: 20).

Thus when we are talking about promoting and developing African languages we cannot ignore the role played by writers. Through the skill of translation we can keep languages alive but this should be supported and undertaken deliberately. The third tradition according to Ngugi, is that of writing in African languages – a reconnection with the medium of orature. Yet this writing is not without difficulties. There are problems of readership, levels of literacy, orthography, diversity of languages, lack of a critical tradition and so on. Writing in African languages, nonetheless has immense implications for critical scholarship. For instance, critics of African literature will need to learn an African language in order to provide

analysis. While borrowing from African orature and world literatures, this third tradition will play a key role in social and cultural renewal. For many years, many East African scholars have created imaginative and analytic works in Kiswahili as well as other indigenous languages. Consequently, non-Kiswahili speakers are finding it necessary to access literature as well as histories of the communities whose experiences are reenacted imaginatively. A new group of students of African languages is emerging and this might explain why a number of language institutions have sprung up around East Africa.

For example, the Nairobi Anglican Church of Kenya School of Language and Orientation trains preachers, researchers and students in Kenyan languages. At the school Gikuyu, Dholuo, Kimaasai, Kimeru, Kiambu, Kitaita, Kipsigis, Kamba and Luhya are taught alongside Kiswahili, French, Spanish, German, Japanese, Arabic and sign language. According to Rev. Samuel Njoroge, “the school was set up in the drive to evangelize as many indigenous people as possible in the languages they understand” (*The Standard* February 24, 2005). In 1965 the Church Missionary Society established a formal place to teach local languages. They knew the power of local languages in enhancing spirituality: “Missionaries would preach for six months and then take a six week break. It is during the break that they would learn local languages” (Rev. Njoroge 25 February 2005).

Institutions such as the School of Language and Orientation have tremendous potential for the promotion and development of African languages, although most are based in the capital cities. With more human traffic across nations, we are likely to see linguistic entrepreneurs cashing in on this goldmine and catapulting African languages to greater heights. They point to what needs to be done with Kiswahili as a national and regional language.

The Educational Arena

A word on language in education. Although the Kenya Institute of Education provides guidelines on what should be taught in schools and contributes in vetting books that would be used in schools, teachers and students have a wide choice. In the case of Kiswahili, for example, general guidelines are given to curriculum implementers and publishers on which linguistic competences would be tested at the end of teaching cycles.

But children in Kenya are acquiring other languages, in addition to the home language, without prompting by parents or educational institutions. Peers in the street, cartoons, radio and television shows, interaction with tourists, neighbourhood groups, house help involved in child rearing, stage performances and so on are important ways of informally learning new languages. Sheng, a youth slang derived from Kiswahili, other African languages, English and a host of tongues including Arabic and Hindi is picked in the streets as a marker of solidarity and inclusion. Young people are inducted into it swiftly by their peers and it is consolidating itself as a medium of cultural productions, such as music. There have been claims that it has a negative impact on the acquisition of English and standard Kiswahili (Mbaabu 1996: 215) and that it should be discouraged in schools. Whatever the case, it is a linguistic phenomenon, tied up with youth culture and the process of globalization. It might be worthwhile integrating it somehow into the school curriculum, instead of wishing it away.

The formal route to the acquisition of Kenyan languages is, of course, more vibrant and sustainable. Where a second language is not acquired naturally in the community, the school has been the most important institution for language learning. In the case of Kenya, most children learn Kiswahili in the streets and in school and the vernacular languages are acquired either within the family or in the community. Vernacular languages are supposed to be taught during the first three years of school but this hardly happens. Throughout the educational system, a system of code-switching seems to dominate.

The promotion and development of indigenous language can also be linked to the policy on adult education. In Kenya, statements related to literacy and adult education can be found in *Sessional Paper No. 10 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya of 1965*; the *Education Commission Report (Ominde Commission) of 1964*; *The Board of Adult Education Act, 1996 (revised 1967)*; the *Presidential Directive of 1978* that created the Department of Adult Education; *Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988* that renewed committee to eradication of illiteracy; and the *NARC Manifesto – 2002* (section 5:2:3) with its commitment to develop a comprehensive adult education programme. If literacy is the ability to acquire skills that will help an individual identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written texts, then it does provide one

with a continuum of learning which facilitates an individual to realize his or her goals. Because adult education is related to the acquisition of reading and writing skills, as well as the development of other functions, it is only logical that it be conducted in indigenous languages and that foreign languages be taught as subjects.

The World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal in April 2000 renewed the world's commitments to Education for All by putting in place two goals to be achieved: (a) ensuring that the learning needs of young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes, and (b) achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. The interest shown by the United Nations General Assembly (Resolution 56/116) in declaring the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) is indicative of some of the opportunities provided by world bodies for the growth of African languages. Literate adult populations are likely to contribute in writing and reading works in indigenous languages. They are also likely to encourage others to do so.

The Kenya literacy programme was launched in 1979 and it resulted in high enrolment rates in adult classes. However, due to a number of factors including the introduction of cost-sharing in all social services – recommended by the International Monetary Fund – and a shortage of personnel, the enthusiasm in the programme has waned. In 1999 for instance, the Population and Housing Census Reports showed that 4.2 million adult Kenyans (out of a population of about 14 million adults) were non-literate. In 1994, although 2.3 million women were non-literate, only 84,000 were enrolled in literacy classes. In 2003 when the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government introduced free primary education, there was renewed enthusiasm for learning and large numbers of adults and children were enrolled, many out of school youth went back to school as did the aged. In Eldoret, an 84 year former freedom fighter registered in class one so that he can read the Bible and count his compensation when it finally comes from the British government. He is motivated by a quest for spiritual and economic well-being.

At a national seminar organized for Faith-Based Organization on 6th-7th July 2004 by the Department of Adult Education and UNESCO, the

role of literacy in realizing Education for All (EFA) goals, the UN Literacy Decade, and the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) was reiterated. In my view, these goals will remain a mirage unless we link them with issues of language and culture. In Kenya, this will require reviewing the Education Act, the Board of Adult Education Act, National Adult Education policy (guidelines and the Non-formal Education Policy Guidelines. It will also require putting in place language specific organs that would ensure language planning work such as status and corpus planning. Matters of translation and lexical expansion will be key.

Revitalizing Kiswahili and African Languages

There is an emerging consciousness among Africans in the diaspora about the importance of learning African languages and contributing in their development. At the 2004 Distinguished Lecture held in Nairobi, Ngugi wa Thiong'o mentioned the impact of *Mutiiri*, the Gikuyu Literary Journal, started while he was at Yale and continued at New York University. Apparently, a contributor to the journal Gatua wa Mbugua, a graduate student in the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences at Cornell University wrote his dissertation in Gikuyu and provided an English translation for his examiners (Ngugi 2004: 11). It is possible that Gatua was partially inspired by *Mutiiri* to write in Gikuyu.

Also, in the course of the journal's existence, many writers have emerged. According to Ngugi most of these had never written in Gikuyu before or in any language for that matter. Others had written in English but never in Gikuyu. A few others had written a few pieces in the language but they had been discouraged by lack of publishing venues. The existence of a forum inspired them all. Among these, one Mwangi Mutahi ... went on to produce two novels in Gikuyu and numerous essays (Ngugi 2004: 13). If journals in African languages can be sustained, they are likely to inspire more writers to reflect on the histories of Africa and to create in the languages of the continent and to engage with their predecessors.

There is no doubt that, Ngugi and his followers are involved in understanding and reinscribing the work of cultural and language scholars that wrote during the colonial days such as Bildad Kaggia, Arthur Barlow, Johanna Kunyihya, the 1909 Kambui readers and ituika entrepreneurs (Peterson 2004: 222). By re-memembering and reconnecting the threads of

linguistic history they hope to create a space for African languages to be heard locally and globally. Gikuyu will continue to benefit from work being undertaken in Kiswahili, as will other Kenyan languages. Some Kiswahili poems by Alamin Mazrui and Abdilatif Abdalla have been published in Mitiiri through translation. This has ensured that Gikuyu readers benefit from Kiswahili literature.

Equally significant is the recognition of Kiswahili as one of the working languages of the African Union. This means that there is the possibility that in future Kiswahili might compete with English and French at continental meetings if Swahiliphone Africa is consolidated through a *lingua franca*. This action of elevating Kiswahili to the continental level is partly attributable to the lobbying and sensitization undertaken by linguists in Africa; linguists who see the irony of not having an African language at the continental forum. But the elevation should not be symbolic; it is important that the space be used meaningfully.

In addition, Article 119(d) of the treaty for the establishment of the East African Community provides for the development and promotion of indigenous languages, especially Kiswahili as the region's *lingua franca*. The treaty for the Establishment of the East Africa Community – Arusha , East Africa Community Secretariat: Article 137). Consequently the 3rd East African Tripartite Commission held in November 2001 directed the Secretariat to facilitate the formation of an East African Kiswahili Council which would serve such purposes as harmonization of vocabulary, promotion of Kiswahili literature, and advocacy of the language's use in the international fora.

To ensure that the three East African nations work together in developing and promoting Kiswahili, The East African Committee on Education, Culture and Sports set up a Task Force to expedite the process of establishing the East African Kiswahili Council. Earlier, the 8th Meeting of the Council of Ministers in the East African Community had urged individual countries of the Community to expedite the formation of the national Kiswahili councils at any rate not later than 30th June 2005 (Report of the Council EAC/CM8/2004 of September 9th 2004). The Task Force compiled the protocols and the establishment of the East Africa Kiswahili Commission is in its final stages having been signed by the Council of Ministers at the time of writing. Tanzania had established, through an

Act of Parliament, the National Kiswahili Council – BAKITA in 1967 but Kenya and Uganda have not due to a number of challenges including bureaucratic bottlenecks and lack of clarity by sections of government over matters of language and culture. Despite the challenges, member states of the East African Community seem committed to the development of the East African Kiswahili Commission.

Kenya has also set up the *Taasisi ya Uchunguzi wa Waswahili ya Afrika Mashariki* (TUSIMA) – Research Institute of Swahili Studies of Eastern Africa (RISS-EA) –located in Mombasa with a campus in Lamu and a regional office in Nairobi. TUSIMA works primarily with local and international students and researchers as well as other groups such as diplomats, staff of the United Nations, and public servants. The Institute, formed under the auspices of the National Museums of Kenya, gives lectures on Swahili history, cultures and arts and offers lessons on Kiswahili language and literature. Similar courses are offered in a number of outlets in Zanzibar, Dar es Salaam and Nairobi. In August 2008, TUSIMA worked with CHAKITA-Kenya to organize a regional conference on language, nationalism and integration.

Conclusion

The development of a language for national integration is imperative and urgent. But even as we seek to develop Kiswahili in the East African region and on the continent, efforts should be made at the national levels to continue supporting local languages. This is especially because through globalization, Western languages and cultures are permeating spaces originally occupied by local languages and artistic modes of expression in a manner never seen before. We have an opportunity to extract the best from globalization and adapt it to our needs in order to come up with something both local and universal. The global does not fully erase the local; rather, it engages it to produce a sense of ‘newness’ and convergence that is both disintegrative and integrative. That newness can be encapsulated in local languages. At the national levels, language policies and implementation mechanisms in favour of national and community languages should be clear and enforceable and clear stipulations for their role in society, and their protection and development should be spelt out in national constitutions. Education, rural-urban migration, increased inter-ethnic interactions and inter-ethnic marriages, are some of the factors

shaping language processes in the homes. If education can be used to entrench the English language in the national psyche it could also be used to reverse the trend in favour of local languages such as Kiswahili. This would not mean an erasure of English in the national curricula but a reassignment of its role through an endorsement of bi-lingual education. Multiethnic societies function best if they share sufficient common ground which allow for interaction and sharing of values. A deliberate crafting of nationhood and the development of national values in Kenya should be guided by Kiswahili. Kiswahili can be one thread and it can also be a transmission belt for national ideals. Local languages would undertake the task of consolidating these ideals in households and communities, instead of undermining them. Consequently, a multicultural nation defined by tolerance and the pursuit of humanist and democratic values would emerge and the Kenyan nation, recently challenged by the 2007-2008 post-election violence reinscribed.

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CHAPTER NINE

Politics as Performance: Dispossession, Elite Transition and the Performative Exercise of Power

Kiama Kaara & Amadi kwaa Atsiaya

Introduction

Performance is generally taken to be a measure of the net output of an action pegged or commensurate to the highest degree of a perceived expectation. Resultantly, the drive to perform has emerged as one of the leading push and pull factors of today's world. Taken literally, in a highly competitive and efficient capitalist system, performance is the benchmark around which we are all measured, be it in our work, social life, education, or any other social interaction.

On the other hand, performance could be looked at from the artistic and highly aesthetic angle, whereby it is not just one of the factors that determine our course of existence as a human race, but rather an integral part of our being human. Thus, performance becomes part of our animated self, best exemplified by the so called professional performers, but who mirror our daily life, whether in the realm of politics, education, religion or health.

The first part of this chapter elucidates the Kenyan society from the perspective of a political discourse, where it endeavours to postulate that it makes sense to evaluate performance on two main dynamics: efficient resource utilization and the perceptions. This is because, within the body politic, decision making is not a "natural" happenstance but is threaded within the whole process itself. Essentially, a relation of power is evident in this process. In most if not all contemporary societies, it revolves around those who wield power and those on whom power is exercised.

Exercise of power, dependant on the end achieved, resonates on whether it serves to empower and uplift the standards, aspirations and expectations of the people or if it emasculates, disempowers and dispossesses the same people on whose behalf it is exercised.¹ The second

part of the chapter shall look at performance as an artistic expression, and how it manifests and is utilized by those who have politics as their main forte.

A nation unravels

The events unfolding in Kenya after the much criticized and controversial elections of 27th December 2007² have exposed the planned failures of our nascent democracy and with it, both the ideological rot and inadequacy across the Kenyan body politic. While this has left many wondering what actually went wrong, we posit that an ideologically bankrupt political process that revolves around access to power, its consolidation and use to accumulate wealth is a recipe for failure. A bastard political economy founded on self preservation ushers in not only a 'bandit'³ economy but a flawed political process that at one hand is divorced from the aspirations of the citizenry (based on a 'social contract'⁴ typology) and appended to the global capital class typically for its service and to act as a transmission line for resource extraction and capital flow best espoused by Walter Rodney in "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa."⁵

With relative calm and stability since independence and ground gained as the economic powerhouse and beacon of peace on this eastern sea board of Africa, Kenya has attained and played a significant strategic role within the global political, financial and economic architecture. It is arguably the most dependable and consistent gateway to Anglo-American imperialist interests on these shores. Kenya's unraveling has confounded many and drawn varied reactions.⁶

The aftermath of the December 2007 elections, has shown that "calm doesn't necessarily mean peace"⁷ and that suspicion, mistrust, competing, contested and contentious interests especially on the question of access to resources and ability to secure livelihoods is a glaring innate conflict that threatens to tear the social fabric of the Kenyan nation apart.

Commentators and observers alike are differentiated in their approach to the analysis of the underlying issues and the emergent aftermath (albeit all too often based on their persuasions along the warring sides). But across board, all are united in the fact that this was not just a one off affair and the effects while tangible in the number of deaths, internally displaced persons (IDPs), razed houses, forced displacements and forced occupations,

collapsed businesses⁸ and infrastructure, lawlessness, rape, animosity, mutual suspicion and the general rapture of the social fabric will have a wide ranging effect, with monumental influence on the character, pace and nature of the emergent Kenyan body politic.⁹

The Crisis of Social Development

In early 2004, while analyzing the challenges facing this country during the current political dispensation, for a background paper during the National Constitutional Conference (Bomas Talks)¹⁰ Kaara highlighted ten items namely:

- The need for a national vision to guide the country's economic and social development
- The need for a lean and efficient government bureaucracy
- The need to devolve power and decision making over the governance of economic resources through a new constitutional order
- The need to invest in industrial development and research
- The need to forge stronger economic, trade, technology and commercial links with the developed countries and the emergent economic powerhouses of the East and Asia
- The need to deepen our understanding of Kenya's economy through research
- The need to develop sports and culture into a major export industry.

The newly elected Kibaki government made an effort to implement some of these options. Significant among them being, the focus to the East (especially China)¹¹, for trade and technology transfer and the mooted of the Vision 2030 strategy.¹²

However while the Vision 2030 blue print makes a good attempt at tackling issues to do with economic management, like other past development blueprints; it fails to give any ideological direction to the nation's social development agenda. Concern with issues such as our level and quality of social development may sound trivial to a nation such as Kenya that is grappling with the challenges of mass poverty and economic underdevelopment. It should however be noted that this seemingly inane

factor may be among the critical missing links to Kenya's transformation into a socially and politically progressive 21st century nation.

The crisis of social development is as significant as the challenge of poverty and economic underdevelopment in Kenya's development process. The holistic social development of a nation is a more complex and challenging phenomenon. Holistic advancement of a society entails more than the mere development of physical infrastructure, access to capital goods, markets and technology. While it is universally acknowledged that ease of access by all to essential livelihood needs (food, shelter, water, healthcare, education) is a significant indicator of a society's social well being, the presence of this attribute does not on its own complete the equation of a society that is socially developed in the holistic sense.

Science and technology may be applied to enhance the ability of a society to access wealth and knowledge, but on their own, these two elements cannot guarantee holistic advancement of a human society. This then begs the question: Can a nation be wealthy, scientifically and technologically advanced and yet be socially underdeveloped? The answer is 'Yes'.

Numerous examples exist where technologically advanced nations with immense wealth suffer from acute crises of social under development – the USA being a good example. A simple natural calamity in the form of a hurricane named *Katrina*, exposed to the entire world to the sorry state of the USA's level of social development.

Social development implies the presence of holistic humanizing and civilizing principles in the political culture and ideological make up of a society. These factors are critical in influencing the behaviour and conduct of the entire society. Most notable in a socially developed (civilized) society is the degree of respect (*heshima*) its members accord one another; the concern and care of another's human wellbeing and human dignity (*utu*); the quest for equity and equality (*usawa*) in the society; the concern for fairness and social justice (*haki*) and the degree of freedoms enjoyed by all (*uhuru*) and last but not least the ease by which all in a society are able to access to essential resources for their livelihood (*uhai*).

The philosophy of *Utu* is an all encompassing Afro-centric philosophy that places uttermost value on the human dignity of both man and woman.

Utu is the spirit that ensures social justice, fairness, respect for each other, the environment and caring for the weak and vulnerable; the aged, the physically and mentally challenged. It is the spirit that ensures that every life is equally valued and held sacrosanct. The level of a society's social advancement in this context is based on the level of its *utu*.

The philosophical ingredients of *utu*, *uhuru*, *haki*, *na usawa* form the software and glue that bond and define a socially developed society. This construct must be distinguished from raw developmentalism, founded on the capitalistic notions of material accumulation that has for decades been touted by the West. A socially developed society should exhibit a high degree of homogeneity in terms of its members sharing the attributes mentioned above. While most citizens of the USA may be able to access capital material goods, the high degree of inequity between black people and whites in accessing essential livelihood needs and economic opportunities does not qualify this great nation to enjoy the status of a socially developed nation. That is what hurricane Katrina remarkably revealed to the world.

Given this context, what then, is the level of Kenya's social advancement? What social challenges face this nation as it strives to join other economically and industrially developed nations? Kenya must avoid the mistakes of major Latin American economies such as Brazil, which rushed to adopt vertical, capitalistic growth models, that promotes wanton wealth accumulation by the minority elite, to the detriment of the rest of society. This model has made Brazil one of the most unequal societies in the world.

Kenya is currently faced with the crisis of social development that has resulted in nearly 60%¹³ of the nation living in a state of social and economic deprivation. Effects of this phenomenon are being reflected in corrupt and unaccountable leadership, rural hopelessness, youth unemployment, mushrooming urban slums, crime and social delinquency among the youth, ethnic hatred and conflicts among other ills. The rise of extremist gangs, of socially disenfranchised youths such as the "*Mungiki*" in parts of Central Kenya and similar ones in other parts of the nation, is a reflection of the depth of Kenya's social underdevelopment crisis.

The more we continue to hang on to the rigid centralized models of development, that promote the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a

few at the centre, the more the country will continue to sink deeper into the abyss of social destitution and society will continue to give birth to endless generations of virulent “*Mungiki*”, “*Chinkororo*” and “*Musumbiji*” gangs. It is a foregone conclusion that Kenya’s problem is embodied in her constitutional and governance framework. It is this more than any other factor that is behind the social and political crisis facing the country today.

To achieve *usawa* among her citizens, Kenya has no choice but to devolve and decentralize power over the governance and management of her economic resources. It is impossible to compensate the Pokot and Turkana for years of economic injustices without instituting a political framework that will give them an appreciable degree of control over their economic destiny.

It does not make sense under the laws of natural justice for the people of Karai in Kiambu to wallow under dehumanizing poverty, while a few kilometers away there is a huge metropolis (Nairobi) that eats up and controls 60% of the nation’s productivity. Let the “*mwana nchi*” of Karai have a say in how national resources are used to solve his/her social developmental challenges. The centralized system of governance in place today, reduces the ordinary Kenyan citizen into a non-human object of pity and powerlessness. This explains why 1,000 of the nation’s citizens can summarily be allowed to perish for the sake of safeguarding the interests of a political class and governance order.

Mwalimu Julius Nyerere of Tanzania lost out on the vertical capitalistic growth formula BUT imbued the Tanzania society with a humanizing philosophy of Ujamaa. In Ujamaa are to be found the elements and principles of *utu* and *usawa*. The challenge left for the post Mwalimu regimes is to ensure the embodiment of this unifying philosophy into current and future economic development models so as to engender a growth pattern model that is wholesome.

On the other hand for Kenya to escape the shame of being permanently condemned into the den of a “man eat man society”, the nation must adopt and champion new social and political order that will entrench the elements of *Utu, uhuru, haki, na usawa* into our way of life. This is the reflection of the performance of Kenya, as it has been steered by the politicians since independence. This new order can be made possible

through deliberate mobilization of the arts and the creativity of the youth. By paying attention to performing and visual arts, the social development agenda can be owned by citizens. In doing so, performance in politics would be repositioned.

Performance as aesthetics and how it is exemplified by Kenyan politics

Scholars, artists and arts commentators have had a lot to say which points to the centrality of performance (which some have always wanted to narrow down to theatre, while others use drama to cover all the length and breadth of performance) in human life. Arnold (1998:3) thus says about performance:

“...we are fascinated by the ability of actors to re-create their self images, and we ourselves continuously take on roles as we move through the shifting demands of our daily lives.”

This statement suggests that performance and role play are natural to man. Therefore, a politician like an ordinary human being is essentially a performer. Arnold (ibid) further argues:

“In actuality, the impulse to perform is part of the way we survive. We adapt to changes in our circumstances by making adjustments in the identity that we present to other people. The human mind is elastic and imaginative in the construction of identity.”

If this is taken to be true, then a politician, just like any other person shares this quality, which he may exercise in the course of execution of his political duties. In accordance with the conventions of performance, a good performance is the one with a good plot. This plot is the product of a thinking process by the creator of the play. In order for the performance to really sink, it must resonate with the needs and aspirations of the audience, or all the players, in case the performance does not recognize the division between those on the main stage and those that are watching and might be invited or not invited onto to the main stage to share in the action.

Arnold (ibid: 5) quotes actor Bill Irwin as approaching characterization by asking himself two questions: 1. What am I afraid of? 2. What are the mechanisms that I’m putting into play to show that I’m not really afraid of that?

Politics itself is a game of fear. Fear for mortal life as politics is a dirty game that includes elimination of foes, both real and perceived; the fear of losing to an opponent, the fear of a certain social situation that threatens the politicians' future, the fear of loss of a fat pay cheque and other privileges that come with political office. The fears are many. Therefore, the politician takes to the rostrum guided and propelled by fear. It is this fear that drives the politician, just like the artist, who must face this fear as he plies his trade of having to perform before a people whose reaction he does not know.

Politicians don't carry out any census to gauge public opinion over what forms their own opinions which they intend to impose on them. To disguise their fear, politicians court their victims to think that they are sailing in the same boat. This may be through the creation of the impression that the politician is so concerned about the situation that the victim is going through, or he himself placing the self at the center of everything to seem to share the circumstances with the victim, thus the oft mouthed 'the people have said/are saying', which is nothing but an attempt to deal with fear by invoking the name of the people or getting them involved, even if it is their first time to hear such proclamations being attributed to them. Politicians have always had self interest at heart and are perpetually afraid of the rise of the masses. Just like in the theatre, politicians put in place every available mechanism to conceal the fact that they are afraid, yet the signs of fear are there for all to see in their eventually poor performance when it comes to their lifestyles. Much as it is natural for the politician to also be a performer, the emergence of artistic performance on the political scene is a manifestation of growth in the field of performance, and especially theatre, especially, when we consider Arnold's (ibid 20-22) words:

"The impulse to perform, to interpret human existence through the presentation of characters on stage has evolved into astonishing variety of theatre traditions...Some times actors speak, sometimes they dance, sometimes they sing. Actors may wear masks or elaborate symbolic costumes, or they may inhabit mythical regions, historical locations or realistic, contemporary environments. They may use elevated speech and gestures or language and actions that correspond with contemporary behaviour".

The proliferation of performance traditions puts a very loose boundary around performance, which as the items enumerated in Arnold's quote above attests, has got very many elements composing it, thus making it far reaching in terms of its definitive elements.

Observing a politician anywhere, one is seeing an actor. Just like a performer, the politician craves the limelight, the podium and the center of events. All this is the territory of the performer. A politician also utilizes some of the vital instruments of a performer. As mentioned above, song, dance and costume are important elements of a performance. Abraham Lincoln is famous for his abilities in speech, so was Britain's Second World War Premier Sir Winston Spencer Churchill. Listening to a speech by Martin Luther King Junior and Winston Churchill, one gets the impression that the two prepared well for their speeches, and theirs was a beautiful performance, just like was the case with Nyerere, the latter who also understood his people so well that he could crack jokes that were relevant to them. However, when you consider speech and compare the aforementioned with characters like Kenya's second president Daniel Moi, one gets the idea behind good and bad speech performance. Good speeches, just like good songs, plays and dances will always be remembered. For example, Sermon on the Mountain in the Bible, I have a Dream by Martin Luther King and a speech by Salim Ahmed Bamahriz, a Kenyan politician who criticized Daniel Moi's clincher which always exhorted the people to stay the way they were; and may God bless them constantly emerge in popular discourse. The latter's good performance lay, according to me, not in the fact of the issues being addressed, but his eloquence and the satirical twist he gave Daniel Moi's send off signature at public rallies '*Kaeni hivyo hivyo na Mungu awabariki*'. For the marginalized, the statement seemed to suggest that their destiny would not change.

Think of music as one of the elements of performance and you have politics on board. In daily life, music is used as a mobilization tool, for recreation purposes and as a conveyor of message. On our political scene, we have songs that are definitive of certain political times and themes. These include patriotic songs like *Harambee Harambee* by Daudi Kabaka, *Kenya Nchi Yangu* by Kelly Brown, *Only Kenya* by Eric Wainaina and the NGO and activist groups' most favourite *Bado Mapambano*. Perhaps the most memorable song in the recent past is *Unbwogable* by the duo of

Gidigidi and Majimaji, which was one of the songs that led the campaign that dislodged the KANU regime from power for the first time since independence, plus the *Yote Yawezekana* number, which was led by Kibaki himself, who was to become Kenya's third president, courtesy to the avalanche that swept KANU out of power. The period leading to the 2002 elections in Kenya produced political singers such as former Members of Parliament Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi and Reuben Ndolo, the latter who was to become very musical in his referendum campaigns against the proposed new constitution in 2005. In the period after the breakdown of National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), the opposition side led by Raila Odinga, of Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) had a singer in Otieno Kajwang', who used the political rostrum to lead the *Bado Mapambano* song, as several musicians got incorporated into performing political songs for campaign purposes, just as has been the case right from the onset of multi-party politics in Kenya. Performance on the public stage has been part and parcel of Kenya's political scene. Unfortunately, much of that performance lacks content that could lead to social development. It is this content that a new engagement with the arts can imbue political arena.

When you consider costuming as an integral part of performance, politics provides a fertile ground where costumes and props of all kinds abound. This ranges from the party colours to the various insignia that party followers will adorn or associate with. During political campaigns, party supporters wear T-shirts, caps bandanas and wave flags of their parties. In Kenya, there have been parties that have had uniforms. An example is the defunct National Development Party (NDP) and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Perhaps known by many people is KANU's red shirts and the ties striped with Kenya's national colours. The symbols of lion for Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD), pen for Forum for the Restoration of Democracy to the People, (FORD-People), a clock for Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the legendary cockerel for Kenya African National Union (KANU) are all part of the paraphernalia that could be incorporated in the range of props and costumes, which are things that politicians rely on to ply their trade. Perhaps the most memorable of these props is the sword that is handed over to the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, who happens to be the most prestigious politician in the land. Then comes the National Holidays when the Commander-in-Chief rides in an open car, inspects a guard of honour, then grants the permission

for the forces to march away. All this is performance, and the sword is kept only by the Head of State, and the open car (a prop) ridden by only him and the Chief of General Staff, the latter who should be in his full military regalia (costume). This stretches to parliament, where costuming is of the essence. Writing in Njogu (2007:68), Mwaura thus observes:

“In other words, in our everyday political reality, we continue to perform ourselves within colonial frameworks that place Western practices on a pedestal. Examples abound: The ceremonial opening of parliament led by a speaker in full regalia of a winter wig and gown, and even worse the “official” dressing code enforced in present day parliament in Kenya, where anything remotely African, and outside the tie and jacket is seen to be out of order, enough to expel a member of parliament from attending to national legislative matters; the presentation of the national budget in parliament complete with costume and décor, to wit, a Minister of Finance in a western suit complete with a carnation, and the contents of the budget in a very specified briefcase type...”

This quote pulls the veil off politicians and the process of exercising political mandate, revealing how much of what the political scene presents to us is a performance, following certain conventions, traditions and precedents. What the politicians wear while carrying out their duties is defined, just as costume is determined by the particular performance, its thematic and ideological slant offering direction. Look at the carrying of the mace (a prop that spells the supremacy of parliament), carried by a seriously costumed Sergeant at arms; in a ceremony that is accompanied by blockings that are found only in parliamentary practice. All that is performance.

Vital and critical to any performance is diction, projection and modulation. Politics is about those interested in political office expressing their needs to the voters. This takes the form of campaigns, where the use of the politician’s voice shall be important. Some good political performers have been known for their booming voices. Among them is Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya’s first president. However, others have been known to have the words. In this category are people like Mwalimu Julius Nyerere and the 2007 parliamentary aspirant for Kamukunji constituency, lawyer PLO Lumumba, whose acrobatics with words and statements puts him in a category of his own. On the whole, political rallies are also one big performance. It is not lost to Kenyans the pomp and colour that greeted

the various stages of campaign for the 2007 general elections, the most competitive in Kenya's political history. There were launches for manifestoes of different candidates and parties, all done with a lot of hype and glitter. Performances meant to magnify the occasion and to also show the politicians' seriousness and daring to go for the real battle in the ballot box were common.

Politics is a game of competition. In competition, there are many forces that are at play trying to make every competitor lose the game. Thus, it complies with the very basic situation posed by any good play. This has been put in a nutshell by Packard (1997: 33) who posits:

"I want something; I have to have something- that is the basis of all dramatic action. If something or someone gets in the way of getting what I want, that is an obstacle I will have to overcome. How badly do I want what I want? That introduces the stakes of my action."

This quotation from Packard resonates well with politics. Political office is highly competitive, especially in Kenya, where it is a highly rewarding office with the least of obligations on the participant, save for superficial theatrics. Politicians are ever in contention with those who would like to wring power from them. Given that a Kenyan member of parliament is amongst the best paid in the world, it becomes a job that is highly coveted, thus the politicians start wanting it badly, and with that, the stakes are raised while performing in the quest to retain and attain political power.

As it has been demonstrated by this chapter, performance permeates all aspects of life. This is buttressed by Taylor (2000:4) who says:

"...I think of a performance as a conversation between you and the audience. A conversation based on listening with the knowledge that the best conversations are the result of *taking in*, as opposed to putting out. A performance is a conversation that starts when you go on stage, take in all that is happening around you, get a sense of where you are and how you feel, and then react to that reality." (His emphasis)

This, indeed, is an insinuation that as a rational being, man is necessarily a performer. Because performance is a conversation, it lies at the heart of a politician's operation as a "professional" and as a common person trying to enter the realm of politics or generally participating in a political activity. Further discussion of how well the politician shall heed the call for *taking*

in and the honesty with which he observes and feels about what is happening around him will not be discussed here. However, it could be used to gauge the competence of politicians as performers. The moral and ideological embankments of performance could also be used as a yardstick to critique and evaluate the performance of politicians, as has been pointed out in the first part of this chapter. This, if done, will address both the theatrics of performance, and the performance based on the indices of development (both social and economic), the latter being the domain of the eventual impact on the people by the political decisions made by the individuals we give the mandate to exercise power on our behalf.

Notes

¹ A classical elucidation on the concept of power can be grasped from a large breadth of existing literature but mainly from the works of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) and especially his groundbreaking book, *"The Prince"*, French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and most contemporary in the works of Antonio Gramsci and especially his concept of 'Hegemony'.

² Kenya has held elections on a more or less consistent five year cycle since independence in 1963. After a long span of a one party rule that ended with the reverting back to a multi party state in 1991 and the subsequent 1992 general elections, the 2007 election was the third as a fledgling democracy. But with heightened tensions within the political space and the subsequent reversals on charges of a fraudulence that gave victory to the incumbent President, Mwai Kibaki, a violence of magnitude never witnessed before erupted leaving around 2,000 people dead and over 600,000 internally displaced. The jury is still out on whether this was spontaneous and sporadic or planned and systematic violence. Notable references of the post-election violence can be glossed from all the main newspapers and other media but a substantive analysis can be picked from the Release Political Prisoners (RPP) *"Repression of the Right to Life and security. Pre and Post 2007 Election Preliminary Report"*, February 2008, and Human Rights Watch (HRW), *"Ballots to Bullets: Organized Political Violence and Kenya's Crisis of Governance"*, March 2008.

³ To the best of my recollection, the term "bandit" in describing the Kenyan economy emerged in the 1990s from the works of among others Mutahi Ngunyi at the Series of Alternative Research in East Africa (SAREAT). It has featured prominently in the works of David Ndii, Wachira Maina *et. al.* and the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) publications especially the Kenyan Scenarios series.

⁴ Classical political theoreticians, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke contributed immensely to this earlier discussion. But it is Rousseau's ground

breaking book “Social Contract” and specifically the Principles of Political right and the analysis on society and the relationship between the individual and the state that are ground breaking.

⁵ Walter Rodney (1973), “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa”, Dar es Salaam University Press.

⁶ This is best captured by the positions and opinions of the leading diplomatic corps in Nairobi; United States, Britain, Canada, Germany and the Delegation of the European Union. US President George Bush in an address during his visit to neighbouring Tanzania opined, “*The world is watching. Kenya cannot be allowed to go the Somali way!*” After a diplomatic gaffe that he was dispatching Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice to make that clear to the leading Principals, Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga, Rice let it out in no uncertain terms, “*There must be real power sharing. And the violence must stop. It cannot be business as usual for Kenya....*”

⁷ One of the main proponents of this line of thought has been the chair of the Government’s Kenya National Commission of Human Rights (KNHRC), Maina Kiai who actually suffered the indignity of being booed and shouted down on a routine visit to an Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp in Eldoret for his opinion that the Government lacked legitimacy due to the contested election and had a shared responsibility for the violence that ensued. It was not lost on many that Kiai a Kikuyu speaking to pre-dominant Kikuyu IDPs was viewed to have betrayed his community-a testament to the tribal polarization of contemporary Kenyan politics.

⁸ The violence and uncertainty that has held sway has entranced ethnic polarization and resulted in socioeconomic paralysis, costing the country an estimated Kenya shillings 100 billion. According to the Central Bank of Kenya Monthly Economic Review for March 2008, the inflation rate has soared to a historic high of 21.8 per cent.

⁹ This chapter has the benefit of hindsight from various presentations, discussions, talks and comments made on the Kenyan situation, notable talks have been at the Centre for Civil Society, UKZN Kenya Seminar, 22/01/08, World Social Forum, Day of Action, Durban, SA, 26/01/08, email Communication with Lee Strauser for the Socialist Register, GENTA – Africa Trade and Finance Linkages Meeting, Johannesburg, 30/01/2008, Jubilee USA Newsletter, and contributions to Wahu Kaara’s papers on the “*Reflections on the Kenya Political Scenario*”, presented at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University in April 2008.

¹⁰ The task was to make an input analysis to the Zero Draft of the National Constitutional Conference Executive Committee in context of the current situation titled, “*Rethinking Our Development Paradigm: An Executive Analysis.*” This was tabled for discussion through committee member, Delegate Wahu Kaara. - The National Constitutional Conference was variously referred to as the ‘Bomas Talks’ drawing its name from its venue, Bomas of Kenya arguably the premier national culture centre.

¹¹ Whereas this is a welcome option to the paternalistic and domineering relationship that has characterized Africa's relationship with the West and its integration to the global political and economic architecture, pundits opine that the China – Africa relation is equally skewed and that China's "See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Talk No Evil" policy is counter productive and threatens to roll back the democratic gains and space that Africa has achieved in the past two decades. Whereas this debate continues to rage, a critical analysis of African perspectives can be found on the premier Africa Social Justice e-magazine, www.pambazuka.org, and at www.focusontheglobalsouth.org, and at the Centre of Chinese Studies based at the Stellenbosch University, SA.

¹² The Vision 2030 is the grand development plan charted as a continuation of the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERSWC 2003-2008). It is supposed to be the guiding development framework for Kenya and seeks to mainstream sectoral planning into a comprehensive national development plan to be achieved in phases.

¹³ A broad literature and statistical data on this can be found in the UN Human Development Reports, the World Bank World Development Reports and in many reports produced by Non-Governmental Organizations both international and local. Critically, the Governments Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) Status Report 2005 paints a similar picture.

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CHAPTER TEN

A Kenyan Intro: Identity Politics in the Performances of a Kenyan Popular Music Band

Tom Michael Mboya & Iddah Wandolo

Introduction

The chapter describes the opening formula in the performances of a Kenyan popular music band, Ja'mnazi Afrika. The interest is in the group's performances at the New Sesia Club, Wagon Hotel, Eldoret, where the group is – and has been for some time now – the resident band. The assumption here is that under the “home” conditions the band operates on its terms, and its formulae are consequently those that it has developed to interact effectively and continuously with familiar fans while attracting new followers. Deploying a theoretical framework derived from semiotics the chapter reads the opening formula in the performances of Ja'mnazi Afrika as a statement on the musical and cultural identity of the band. Via this opening formula, (which is made up of a tuning of the musical instruments, playing of Latin and Congolese *rhumba* instrumentals and slow tempo - mainly Tanzanian and Congolese - music of the 1980s) Ja'mnazi Afrika gestures its desired definition of itself as a cosmopolitan, national, all-Kenyan, even pan-African band, rather than that of a music group that is “owned” by any of Kenya's “tribes”. This identity forms a basis of the relationship between the group of modern oral artists and their multi-ethnic/national audience.

The Opening Formula

The New Sesia Club of Wagon Hotel, Eldoret, is the most prestigious of the specialist live band venues in Eldoret town. The Wagon Hotel is itself a major hotel located right in the middle of town. And Eldoret is a big town by Kenyan standards, the fifth after Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu and Nakuru. As is the case in the other big towns in Kenya the population of Eldoret is multi-ethnic. In the words of Busolo Wegesa,

[a]s an urban centre, Eldoret has tapped from virtually all Kenyan ethnicities. Its proximity to the [Ugandan] border and position on the international highway also opens it to a sizeable alien population (in Indangasi et al, eds. 2006:118).

The bigger groups of the non-Kenyan population are Sudanese, Ugandan, and Congolese (DRC). And there are the sizeable populations of “Indians” (as all south-east Asians are called in Kenya) and Somalis whose nationality it is not easy to determine. Due to this mix of peoples, and in the absence of a dominating culture of the town’s original/ “authentic” inhabitants that would, as happens in Mombasa and Kisumu, subsume the other cultures that come into its space, Eldoret is highly cosmopolitan - perhaps of Kenyan towns second only to Nairobi in this respect.

Ja’mnazi Afrika performs at the New Sesia Club twice a week, on Friday and Saturday nights. Now, Ja’mnazi Afrika is a popular music group. It was formed in 2002 by Awilo Mike¹, Milton Ongoro and Peter Daliti. Presently² Ja’mnazi Afrika is an all male nine piece band and the three founder members make up a triumvirate in the group’s organizational structure. The members (six Kenyans, two Congolese and one Tanzanian) are from diverse ethnic backgrounds. And, in the words of the journalist Amos Ngaira, Ja’mnazi Afrika is -

the most talked about band in Kenya today. And it’s because of their catchy, mid-tempo Benga song, *I’m Not Sober*, which has gripped the attention of music lovers. The young and old, men and women, and even children sing along, every time it is played on radio. (*Sunday Nation*, September 18, 2005)

According to Awilo, the spokesman of the band, “Ja’mnazi” means both “that coconut tree” and “like a coconut tree” in a Kenya-coast Kiswahili dialect. Awilo chose the name “Ja’mnazi” for its symbolic associations. The coconut tree is the tallest tree in its habitat, the same way as Ja’mnazi Afrika (is imagined by the musicians tower(s) over other Kenyan dance bands. The coconut tree is useful to the human communities that inhabit areas where the tree grows. It gives fruit, spice, drink (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic), fuel, building and roofing material, furniture wood, etc. Likewise, Ja’mnazi Afrika offers music lovers much.

Interestingly, even though Ja’mnazi Afrika is usually characterized in the media as a *benga* band and their first “hit” *I’m Not Sober* is obviously a

benga song, Awilo, who composed *I'm Not Sober*, hesitates to have the group defined as a *benga* band, explaining that they play different African styles, *benga* included. In this vein it is interesting to note that *benga* is not directly named in the list of music Ja'mnazi Afrika plays as announced in a prominent backdrop that hangs above the stage in the New Sesia Club, Wagon Hotel, Eldoret, where Ja'mnazi Afrika is – and has been for some time now – the resident band. The banner states that the “New Sesia Club gives revelers an opportunity to dine wine and dance to the best of Bango Lingala African contemporaries & special numbers with Ja'mnazi Afrika – live band”.

The performances of Ja'mnazi Afrika at the New Sesia Club begin any time between 6.30 and 8.00 pm. Whatever time it starts, it follows the same order, takes the same shape, hence its being a formula. This is how it goes.

A first batch of musicians sneaks into their part of the hall, behind the stage. Ordinarily, the auditorium is still virtually empty at this time. Three or four of them get to the stage and start going through the motions of tuning the instruments. The drummer usually starts the process. He remains in place after tuning his drums, keeping rhythm as the guitars and the keyboard are tuned, one after another. Sometimes one musician tunes all the guitars, at other times several musicians do it – each to an instrument. The tuning of the keyboard is embedded in the tuning of the guitars. Then the microphones are connected and tested. All this happens under the direction of either Ongoro or Peter Daliti who, themselves instrumentalists and vocalists, sometimes do the actual tuning up. The tuning of instruments can take anything between fifteen to forty five minutes.

Then the warm up begins. The warm-up is a two part session. The first part is a continuation of the tuning process, though here several instruments are played together. Even so, the different guitars are separately given prominent parts in these instrumental renditions of mostly Latin and early Congolese tunes. Even when European music is played – “I believe in Angels” by ABBA, for example – it is given that Latin flavour. In the second part of the warm-up vocal music is played. Again, Congolese *rhumba* mostly, but now with a significant dose of slow-mid tempo Tanzanian Kiswahili dance music (“muziki wa densi”, as it is called) of the 1970s-1980s. Occasionally thrown in, is a Kenyan Kiswahili slow tempo

classic, like “Malaika”. Also prominent in the course of the second part of the warm-up, especially on those occasions when Peter Daliti is in charge is the speaking out in the Lingala language. Phrases in the language are bandied about, sometimes inserted between songs, sometimes interjected into music that they have absolutely no relationship with.

Part two of the warm-up flows into performance proper so smoothly it is all but impossible to pinpoint exactly when the change happens. Change does take place, however, and the fans (the auditorium has all the while been filling up) either sense it or bring it about by flocking onto the dance floor. We take it that warm-up ends when Ja’mnazi Afrika starts playing relatively recent music. This is usually Tanzanian and Congolese tunes of the 1990s. As performance proper continues the tempo of the music will be upped and Kenyan guitar musics in the country’s languages (Kalenjin, OluLuhya, DhoLuo, EkeGusii, KiTaita, etc.) will supplant Kiswahili and Lingala music. It is in this phase of the performance that Ja’mnazi Afrika also plays its original music.

Semiotics

Thus the opening formula in the performances of Ja’mnazi Afrika comprises the tuning of instruments and the warm-up, which happens as we have described it above. For the purposes of clarity it is important to point out that there is no absolute necessity to do the tuning of instruments at the time Ja’mnazi Afrika does it, that is just when performance is about to begin. It can be done by an advance party early on in the day; the guitars, being portable, can be tuned from elsewhere; etc. Therefore, this tuning of instruments as the start of performance is a style, and one that – as we shall show presently – signifies other meanings. To help us read this opening formula we rely on some ideas we get from semiotics.

Semiotics teaches that texts are complexes, configurations or assemblages of signs (such as words, images, sounds and/or gestures). *Anything* that can be perceived as representing something else by a number of people is a sign, and any group of related (in whichever way) signs constitute a text. Understood this way, musical performances like the ones we concern ourselves with in this paper are texts. The opening formula in the performances of Ja’mnazi Afrika is an introductory part of a long text, but it can also be read on its own. And to do so we are guided by Barthes’s

idea of two orders of signification, and specifically of the second order: *connotation*.

According to Barthes there are two levels of meaning. The first level is that of denotation. This is “the common-sense, obvious meaning of the sign” (Fiske, 1990:85-86). The denotative meaning is intended to communicate the objective semantic content of the represented thing. Most people would agree on the meaning of a (complex of) sign(s) at this level. For example, the tuning of instruments by Ja’mnazi Afrika is at this level just that it is the tuning of instruments by musicians who are getting ready to perform.

Connotation is the second-order of signification. Here (an) additional meaning(s) is (are) attached to the denotative meaning of a (complex of) sign(s). There are deeper meanings and implications here. Connotation “describes the interaction that occurs when the sign meets the feelings or emotions of the users and the values of their culture.” (Fiske, 1990:86) To find meaning at this level we look at the context, and draw from our own cultural knowledge. This is what we do now with respect to the opening formula in the performances of Ja’mnazi Afrika.

Identity Politics

We asked Awilo why Ja’mnazi Afrika plays the kind of music it plays as its opening formula. His answer was that this is a Kenyan convention, this is a Kenyan intro to live band performance. It is what is, and has for a while now been, done by what he described as “the major bands in the country”. A confirmation (of sorts) of this is given in a description of the performance programme repertoire given by C. Okumu in his 1990s study of music in which he characterizes Kiswahili Songs in Nairobi (1998). In that case then Ja’mnazi Afrika fits itself into an identity bestowing tradition; by following the historical custom of the major (“big”, successful) bands in Kenya Ja’mnazi Afrika signifies that it belongs with them. The group is, to use their symbol, a “mnazi” (coconut tree).

The tuning of instruments that kicks off the opening formula in the performances of Ja’mnazi Afrika hints at both the musical and cultural identities of the band. By giving prominence to the guitar, this tuning of instruments signals that the group plays a kind of “guitar music”. Guitar music is “modern” (i.e. significantly influenced by the West) music in

Kenya. It is, due to its acknowledged essential hybridity, perceived as being quite distinct from non-guitar “traditional” musics, even where there is a significant relationship between the guitar music (say, *benga*) and a traditional music type (say, the *nyatiti* of the Luo). Guitar music is therefore somewhat less owned by the different ethnic groups; it is everybody’s music, regardless of the language the lyrics are in. The special relationship a people will have with guitar music played in their language will not automatically lock out those who are not native speakers of that language from enjoying the music, as will likely happen with “traditional” music. “Traditional” music is taken to be “tribal” music. The tuning of instruments that kicks off the opening formula in the performances of Ja’mnazi Afrika therefore invites Kenyans of all ethnic backgrounds to a dance.

Which observation brings us to a further consideration of the band name “Ja’mnazi Afrika”, and of the name of the band name’s originator, “Awilo”. We do not see that it is far-fetched to take the name “Ja’mnazi” coined by a DhoLuo speaker (in spite of that speaker’s claims to a more complex and hybrid – Nyala-Luo – cultural identity) to mean “man of the coconut tree”. “Ja”, DhoLuo for “man of”, being a commonly used prefix that fixes one to specific geographical space. And since coconuts grow only at the coast (far indeed from the Nyala-Luo lands in western Kenya), which in the popular Kenyan imaginary is the land of the “urbane” Swahili, being a “Ja mnazi” signifies “worldliness” and being “civilized”. It is a sign that has a long history, for, as Ranger informs us, even in the years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries “[t]he Swahili townsman prided himself on being free from the bondage of tribe and on being master of an urbane lifestyle.” (1975:18) These associations, of the worldliness and urbaneness of the Swahili, were most successfully sold to non-Swahili Kenyans. With time the associations have been extended beyond the definition of the Swahili to embrace the coast as place. Any person who feels at home at the coast would want to signal to others that s/he is not “tribal”. Together with his adoption of the name “Awilo” (after Awilo Longomba, a flamboyant Congolese musician who had a couple of hit albums in Kenya in the 1990s) we see in Ja’mnazi (“man of the coconut”) a consistent attempt by Awilo to transcend the obviously limiting ethnic tag. In this way we consider the Afrika (with a “k”) that is part of the band name as a further elaboration of this basic theme, but one that also asserts Awilo’s desired nationalism (uniting the different “tribes” into a bigger

African “tribe”) and pan-Africanism. The flaunting of Congolese influence becomes another indicator of this pan Africanism, but also of “worldliness”.

Back to the opening formula. The first, instrumental part of the warm up starts a process of making the definition of music type more precise. This is modern African guitar music that is influenced at the root by Latin *rhumba*. By the second part of the warm up the music is generally situated, in spatio-temporal terms. Central – East African music of the late twentieth century. Here, too, distance is established between the music being played and Kenyan ethnic identities. This is not the music of any one “ethnic group”. At the same time this is music that most “modern” Kenyans are familiar with and generally consider to have been seminal in the development of “modern” African music. It is music whose acceptance and appreciation has transcended the ethnic differences in Kenya. Again, Kenyans from all ethnic backgrounds are being invited to a dance.

But this almost wholly non-Kenyan music played by Ja’mnazi Afrika as their opening formula is not only a gesture of the band’s refusal to be defined as a “ethnic” music group but also, and paradoxically, a signaling of its desire to be perceived as a national, all-Kenyan band. To begin to understand this seemingly warped logic one must refer to the power that “ethnicity” exerts on the politics of Kenya.

The power of “ethnic group” has historically posed and continues to pose a challenge to state rationalization in postcolonial Kenya, state rationalization being “the establishment of ‘efficient and orderly’ rule within specified territorial boundaries.” (Kembo-Sure, 1998) To meet this challenge the country’s leadership has from time to time attempted what is commonly referred to as “nation-building”.

An important aspect of this effort to bring the different “ethnic groups” together into one nation is language planning, the adoption of a common national language to be owned and used by all the *wananchi*. Language planning is undertaken because

language loyalty [the kind associated with “ethnic group”] can be a powerful weapon, and has often been manipulated to political advantage ... [T]he fear is that language loyalty may prove to be stronger than national loyalty.” (Trudgill, 1983: 151-152)

Musically, the non-Kenyan music now played by Ja'mnazi Afrika as their opening formula was the common language selected by the state in the 1980s-90s as an aspect of nation-building. John Kamau, writing in 1998, informs us:

The state-run Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) bans songs in any of the country's 40-plus vernacular languages from its two national services. The blacklist was imposed 12 years ago when then radio boss Cornelius Nyamboki insisted musicians sing in either Swahili or English to curb the rise of 'ethnic nationalism'. It didn't affect languages used beyond Kenya's borders: 75 per cent of the national playlist are in the Lingala of former Zaire, while Swahili lyrics now chip in a mere 20 per cent. (In *Index on Censorship* 6 1998)

It is not surprising that at the time (1980s-90s) the Kenya-based Congolese (then Zairean) bands became the major bands in the country, and consequently the trendsetters. There was even a scandal of one of these bands representing Kenya in an international cultural fare. Kenyan would-be major bands "naturally" copied the conventions of the Kenya-based Congolese bands, either disregarding or oblivious to the cultural meanings of the conventions.

Our experience of the Kenya-based Congolese bands of the 1980s-90s is that they played similar – Latin and Congolese *rhumba* - music in the warm-up, but with them the music was their heritage and thus helped define their identities. The token "Malaika" would then, besides being a polite salute to the Kenyan hosts, be an acknowledgement of the Kenyan influence in their music.

The dominance of the Congolese bands, and of modern Congolese music in general, even gave birth to the idea that Lingala, the language in which this music is sung, is a musically, "sweet" language. Hence the bandying about of Lingala phrases into the opening formula of Ja'mnazi Afrika's performance. According to Awilo, these Lingala phrases "nice up, add salt to" performance. But, obviously, this throwing about of Lingala phrases is also another instance of the distancing of the "language of performance" from Kenyan ethnic identities.

By the mere fact of its being state-encouraged the non-Kenyan music played by Ja'mnazi Afrika as their opening formula automatically became in the 1980s-90s the music of power, of prestige. And given that in

postcolonial Kenya power has historically been domiciled in “town”, the music also became the music of “town”. In the rural countryside Kenyan musics in the languages of the country’s ethnic groups thrived, and resisted – with varying degrees of success - the foreign onslaught. But in the multi-ethnic town this non-Kenyan music was dominant. There is also the plain fact that the Congolese bands that made their way into Kenya found, indeed had to find, bases in town. The non-Kenyan music could only be danced to “live” in town.

From the mid 1980s, then, the ownership of this non-Kenyan music was part of the state-sponsored concept of Kenyan national identity. The triumvirate that leads Ja’mnazi Afrika went through their musical apprenticeship, though separately, in these years. When Ja’mnazi Afrika makes a statement of ownership of that foreign music by performing it as opening formula the statement then comes to gesture not only the group’s refusal to be “owned” by any one of the country’s “ethnic groups” but also the band’s cosmopolitanism and all-Kenyanness. The opening formula thus introduces Ja’mnazi Afrika as a Kenyan band³.

The eagerness to identify with a national, as opposed to an “ethnic”, identity may in part explains Awilo’s reluctance to have Ja’mnazi Afrika defined as a *benga* band, *benga* – for all its “modernity” and dispersal (see Kariuki, 2000 for a statement on this) – having a significant link with one Kenyan “ethnic group”, the Luo. Little wonder, then, that the banner in the New Sesia Club omits *benga*. There is, we believe, something to be said about the fact that *bango*, a music-type from the coast, is cited first in this list, which – again significantly – picks out for mention Congolese music (“Lingala”) and lumps everything else together in the category “African contemporaries”. It is obviously in keeping with some of the things that have been said here that the Swahili-language *bango* music and “Lingala” are directly listed in that menu of musics served by Ja’mnazi Afrika.

Kenyanness and cosmopolitanism together constitute a foundation that robs ethnic sentiment of its (especially negative) power. It would seem that with this base of unity that is constructed by the opening formula there is room for comfortable diversity, for, as has been mentioned, in the performance proper Ja’mnazi Afrika plays Kenyan guitar musics in the languages of the country’s ethnic groups. They do not alienate any group from their performances by so doing. On the contrary, as Ngaira phrases it, “Ja’mnazi ... has won legions of fans because of its multi-lingual

repertoire. They sing in Lingala, Luo, Luhya, Kiswahili and English.” (*Sunday Nation*, September 18, 2005).

The fan of Ja'mnazi Afrika

We keep it in mind that the performances of Ja'mnazi Afrika, like other popular texts generally, construct, validate, pull apart or simply express group identity. This important community-building function takes on added significance when we bring into view (as we have done in these pages) the justification for and the resistance to the building of a Kenyan nation.

In this regard we emphasize our considered opinion that the expression of the idea of Kenyanness that is found in the opening formula in the performance of Ja'mnazi Afrika will not be lost on their (potential) fan who (would) regularly attend(s) their performances at the New Sesia Club.

In fact, this fan of Ja'mnazi Afrika is likely to identify with, or at the very least understand, that expression. And this because, being generally over thirty years old (younger people are more likely to be found in the discotheques), this fan of Ja'mnazi Afrika will have lived, either as a child or young adult, through the political history in which the particular expression is rooted. This is a person that lived through the cultural policies of the 1980s-90s.

Since the venue of performance (the Wagon Hotel, Eldoret), - all but makes it impossible for the unemployed or poorly paid to frequent the performances of Ja'mnazi Afrika, the fan of Ja'mnazi Afrika is likely to have been educated beyond high school (given the general employment policies and practices in Kenya), to be currently working up their career (and may be going through the mid-life crisis) and, consequently, having some money they are willing to spend on “fun”.

This is not the kind of person that will be insensitive to the cultural diversity found in Kenya, and to the power of “ethnic group” in the country's politics. Indeed, this person is likely to have more than a passing interest in the politics of Kenya. Equally likely, the idea of a Kenyanness that transcends, without necessarily destroying, ethnic identity will be appealing to this “modern” person.

And this is the idea Ja'mnazi Afrika invites its fans to celebrate in song and dance. In short, this person is primed for a relationship with Ja'mnazi

Afrika, and at the base of that relationship is the identity politics in the opening formula in the band's performance.

Notes

- ¹ These are the stage names, which may or may not be the musicians' real names.
- ² The research on which this paper is based was carried out in 2005.
- ³ In an interesting development along these lines Awilo started composing original music in Lingala in 2004-2005. We are thankful to Michael Otieno Ooko ("Awilo"), with whom we had two useful conversations.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Mungiki: The Fourth Estate and Kenya's Public Enemy No. 1

Kibe Mungai

Today the majority of the former freedom fighters wander about in the country in quest of jobs and something to eat and they complain very bitterly that they were betrayed by the government which they put into power. You see, despite our great sacrifice during the Mau Mau war of national independence, the Kenyatta government sided with the British and the Kenyan traitors against us. Kenyatta and KANU betrayed the precious blood we shed for land and freedom. Consequently, we have been left without freedom or food: to hold a public meeting is a crime, to make use of any civil rights is met with a rain of brutality, and the road to independence and progress is paved with the bricks of betrayal, half-truths and false promises (*Wanja wa Mugo*).

These sombre and poignant words were first spoken to historian Maina wa Kinyatti by a peasant woman and Mau Mau veteran on July 07, 1978. It is just as well that we preface this review with that solemn reflection of the fate that befell the veterans and supporters of Mau Mau after Kenya attained independence precisely because no discussion about the Mungiki ends without memories of the Mau Mau cropping up. There are many reasons why this is so. First the Mungiki adherents themselves proclaim and hold themselves openly and proudly as the heirs of the Mau Mau legacy controversial as it remains half a century later.

Secondly, like the Mau Mau, Mungiki members subscribe to a conservative interpretation of Gikuyu culture which tends towards unadulterated disdain of Christianity and Western cultural expressions. Indeed in its earlier phases Mungiki sported Mau Mau-type dreadlocks and worshipped in the traditional ways until state repression made it dangerous to publicly identify themselves by dress modes. Finally the Mungiki believe it is their sacred mission to redress real and perceived injustices occasioned upon their fore-fathers both in the colonial and post-colonial eras. With all these faces and complex missions, it is not surprising

that Mungiki remains a great mystery despite numerous attempts in popular media and academic writing to unravel its ways and understand the causes of this movement with deep roots among rural and urban Gikuyu underclass.

Mungiki seems to signify different things to various people. To some it is a cultural group and sometimes a religious cult, socio-political movement, economic extortionists, vigilante group, criminal gang, Kikuyu militia and even blood-sucking monsters! Quite often Mungiki is characterized as a mixture of one or more of these facets. Since 1992 when its existence became public, Mungiki has occupied a near-permanent space in national political discourse but it is only from mid 2007 – when its members were implicated in several macabre killings in Central Kenya – that its existence and activities turned into a plague that can no longer be wished away.

Expectedly, the media have been at the forefront of informing the public about the activities and travails of Mungiki and also providing a forum for what passes as informed debate of the mysteries of a movement of illiterate and semi-literate youth from Central Kenya supposedly bent on spoiling the party of Uhuru and derailing the train of capitalistic civilization in Kenya. Given the powerful sentiment it evokes among all sections of people and shades of opinion, it is rare to come across a sympathetic story about Mungiki in the mainstream media. Unfortunately sentiments and idiosyncrasies seem to have succeeded in compounding the enigma of Mungiki thereby denying the country an honest, objective and critical understanding of and discourse on the premier newsmaker in Kenya over the last one decade. Accordingly in this review, besides analyzing the broad reaction of the Kenyan media to Mungiki, we shall also attempt to shed light on the real issues underlying the origin, evolution and growth of Mungiki.

The Reaction of the Kenyan Media to Mungiki

On Tuesday 8th April, 2008 at 3 pm the wife and driver of jailed Mungiki leader Maina Njenga were abducted in Nairobi West as they were driving towards Rongai in a Toyota Rav4. Three days later the bodies of Virginia Nyakio Maina and her driver Geoffrey Njoroge were found dumped at the Nairobi City Mortuary with tell-tale signs of brutal murder. Their

throats were slit and their bodies bore deep wounds on the abdomen, hands and head apparently inflicted by machetes. The *Nairobi Star* reported that records at the City Mortuary indicated that the bodies were brought in a day after the two had been reported missing and booked as unidentified male and female.

Upon the abduction of the duo, their families had accused the police of being responsible and, in retrospect, the subsequent reaction of the police did little to allay that suspicion. As the *Nairobi Star* pointedly observed: “The Gatundu police had apparently been alerted after the bodies were found in the bush within Gatundu. It is not known why the bodies were brought to Nairobi rather than the nearby Thika Mortuary. On Thursday, Nairobi Police told the media that they had no knowledge of the whereabouts of Virginia and Geoffrey despite Gatundu Police having dropped the bodies at the mortuary. Family members believe that the police may know more about the deaths than they are admitting... Some sources believe it was an execution by the police but disguised as a Mungiki-style killing.”

Two days after the media announced the murder of Virginia and Geoffrey, President Mwai Kibaki unveiled the new cabinet of the coalition government but the following morning Kenyans woke up to a day of terror and violence unleashed by Mungiki members instead of the usual grumbling about who won or lost in the sharing out of cabinet positions. Within hours of Mungiki’s violent protests police in Nairobi opened fire on them killing at least 12, maimed scores with bullets, as they clubbed and subdued others. One Mungiki member was lynched in Eldoret, hundreds of suspected sect members were arrested across the country. Reportedly Mungiki sect members killed three people – surprisingly known sect members – in Gatundu and burnt 30 vehicles in Nairobi besides barricading highways using trucks in the style widely deployed by disputed presidential election protesters in Eldoret earlier in the year.

The following day the press was categorical in its condemnation of Mungiki. The *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*, Kenya’s leading dailies bore identical screaming headlines: “**Mungiki Mayhem**” in the issues of April 15, 2008.

In one of the news commentary titled “**How this vicious group survives**”, *Daily Nation*’s Patrick Nzioka thundered: “The Mungiki sect is

a monster that has refused to be killed. One of its unique characters that might explain why it has defied crackdowns by the authorities is its ability to mutate when faced with unfavourable conditions. Since it surfaced in the 1990s, Mungiki has changed from being a religious grouping that called on the Kikuyu community to return to old ways of worship, to a criminal gang that uses the sword to push its agenda”.

These violent demonstrations were caused by several grievances held by Mungiki but the spark was the controversial murder of Virginia and her driver. Even before investigations had started the police attributed the double executions to turf wars within the Mungiki hierarchy. Denying a role in the said murders Police spokesperson Eric Kiraithe reasoned: “Police cannot reduce themselves to using a machete to slit someone’s throat in the way the woman was killed. We are professionals”.

Citing an anonymous senior Mungiki member the *Nairobi Star* of April 15, 2008 ran a sensational story under the banner headline “**Mungiki Revenge**” which controversially claimed that Monday’s riots were triggered by a battle for the control of the millions of shillings collected daily through numerous Mungiki rackets. The story claimed that hours before her abduction Virginia had withdrawn Shs 5 million in cash from one of the many bank accounts run by the sect members in Nairobi. Details of the bank and account number were not given and the story soon fizzled out in thin air.

In fairness, that bloody Monday April 14, 2008 was one of Mungiki’s sunniest days in the Kenyan media. Their leaders spoke on live radio and before television cameras. The following day the *Daily Nation* and *Daily Metro* carried an interview with Njuguna Gitau Njuguna, the spokesman of the Kenya National Youth Alliance, the political wing of Mungiki. The spokesman vehemently denied Maina Njenga could have ordered for the killing of his wife due to a domestic problem. He added: “We have declared war against this government for the ills they have committed against us. John Michuki (former Internal Security Minister) formed the *Kwekwe* Police unit to kill us and now they (the government) have sunk to the lowest level of cowardice and inhumanity by killing a defenceless woman”.

On the first day of this war 20 suspected members of Mungiki were shot dead by the police in Nairobi, Central Province and contiguous

districts of Nakuru and Laikipia. On the face of it the police did fairly well in terms of casualty figures and arrests but this did not stop television stations from posing the question during prime time news whether the police were doing enough to contain or wipe out Mungiki. Of course, majority of the respondents said the police were not doing enough effectively priming the nation for more bloodletting in the war against Mungiki. It made me wonder: Are Kenyans all this blood-thirsty or it only occurs when Mungiki happens on the scene?

Normally editorial writers are more circumspect and reflective but this does not seem to be the case when it comes to Mungiki. As witness the *Daily Nation* of April 15, 2008 commented on the riots of bloody Monday thus:-

For years, the government has assured Kenyans that it was committed to erasing the Mungiki sect from the face of the earth. But after every such assurance, the sect members have always resurfaced to put the Government's assurances to shame. Yesterday's highly co-ordinated pre-dawn "protests" in various Nairobi suburbs and in Nakuru, Naivasha, Nyeri, Thika, Gatundu, Nyahururu and even Eldoret towns proved beyond doubt that far from being dead and buried, the Mungiki sect had only metamorphosed into a hydra-headed monster that defies all attempts to eradicate it... It is also possible that the sect's politicization – it is said that politicians have funded and used them to carry out their hatchet work – could have turned them bitter after being used and dumped. Whatever the case, the issue is clear: The Government security machinery has signally failed to contain this criminal organization, which has gained notoriety for extortion and grisly executions. There are convincing indications that very senior politicians in both the past and present government used the sect to carry out dirty political work. Perhaps that is where the impunity springs from. This is a challenge to the Government. Will it allow the Mungiki to set up a parallel government, run a reign of terror and thumb a nose at the rule of law?

There was no mention of the extra-judicial executions cited by Mungiki as one of the reasons for the violent riots. Even worse, there was no mention of the 20 suspected Mungiki members shot dead the previous day either demonstrating or mainly in cold blood in the Dandora-Kayole areas in Nairobi. Not to be outdone, the following day *The Standard* editorialist in the issue of April 16, 2008 intoned:

Widespread Mungiki mayhem has put to lie the government's claim last year – in the wake of a bloody repression campaign sparked by a spate of beheadings – that the outlawed organization had been wiped out. It has also demonstrated the inadequacy of the police force's tactics in tackling the sect's unique brand of organized crime. Police concentrate on neutralizing the gang's leadership and closing recruitment avenues. The arrests and disappearances of key members, however, seem to have merely opened the door to new leaders. Rank and file membership appears undiminished barely a year after the ruthless pre-election crackdown.

The words are profoundly chilling when you think about it. Though liquidation of Mungiki's leadership and disappearances of key members is outrightly illegal and criminal, the editorialist's regret seemed to be that these hard measures had not succeeded to wipe out Mungiki. Which leads us to a chilling question: Could extra-judicial executions and disappearances in Kenya be legitimate if they could help wipe out the Mungiki?

In the midst of all these tragic happenings the media managed to humour a traumatized nation with alleged investigative stories and rumours that must have amazed our police at the credulity of our journalists. There were stories about alleged splits among Mungiki that failed short of clearly stating the hierarchy of the rival factions. *Daily Metro* even told us that Maina Njenga's house at Kitengela is a 50 million palace "fit for a king" but built on extortion money and illegal levies in Nairobi slums and ghettos.

Reading a fortnight's stack of newspapers between April 15, 2008 and May 3, 2008 does not leave the critical reader with more than a foggy idea of what makes Mungiki tick or help to explain why *lasser faire* executions have seemingly failed to wipe it out. Occasionally though, one comes across fairly lucid commentaries on Mungiki albeit shallow in depth and rather ahistorical considering the deep roots of Mungiki in Kenya's laboured nation making project. It is for these reasons that we set out to discuss various major themes brought to fore by the socio-political phenomena that revolve around Mungiki.

The Grievances and methods of Mungiki

In his interview with the *Daily Nation* on bloody Monday, KNYA's spokesman Njuguna Gitau Njuguna stated the grievances of Mungiki as

follows: "We are sending a message to the Government that we are tired of the extra-judicial killings of our members. The latest one is Virginia Nyakio Maina, wife of our leader Mr. Maina Njenga while thousands others have gone missing. We also want our party to be left to operate like any other political party in the country. We are also demanding the unconditional release of our leader as he was arrested on fabricated charges". For good measure, he added: "We are the direct offspring of the Mau Mau drawing our inspiration from Dedan Kimathi who once proclaimed: Better die standing than live on your knees!"

The invocation of the Mau Mau legacy is Mungiki's entry point to the cry for historical justice by veterans, supporters and descendants of the Mau Mau. Are these demands legitimate? If they are, why are they quickly dismissed as though the cause of Mungiki is phoney, subversive and even treasonous? Is Mungiki simply about bands of criminals invoking historical injustice to prey on innocent members of society? Let us analyze these grievances consecutively starting with the historical element. At the height of the Mau Mau war for land and freedom in September, 1953, about 100,000 Kikuyus had been repatriated from the White Highlands – mainly in today's Rift Valley Province to the Kikuyu reserve, and an estimated 60,000 remained to be screened. During the infamous "Operation Anvil" about 24,000 Mau Mau suspects were arrested and detained in the city of Nairobi, some 3,400 women and over 6,000 children were repatriated to the reserves. In total the male Gikuyu, Embu and Meru population of the city was reduced by more than half. That these tough emergency measures had severe implication on Gikuyu society is attested by the fact that on 30th September, 1953 the colonial government decided to abolish the policy of repatriating the Gikuyu to the reserves because in the circumstances prevailing at the time, it was impossible to absorb more than 100,000 people who had already been repatriated and thousands more who had returned voluntarily.

At the social level, as a result of the Emergency operations, in 1954 there were between 2,000 and 3,000 mainly Gikuyu children wandering about the streets of Nairobi every day, living out of dustbins and sleeping, whenever they could. This problem of alienated and homeless children was compounded by the fact that barely a month after the declaration of a state of Emergency, Governor Sir Evelyn Baring announced the proscription of the Kikuyu Independent Schools Association (KISA) and

the smaller, but more radical Kikuyu Karing'a Education Association. Consequently, between 300 and 400 Kikuyu schools which had been started under the aegis of KISA and without any assistance from the government, missionaries or European settlers, had, by the stroke of a pen been closed down. As a result between 60,000 and 70,000 students had been thrown out on the streets on the ground that subversive teachings had been indulged by some teachers in these schools. Although the ostensible reason for all these harsh measures were to eradicate the social institutions and organization that supported Mau Mau, the real objective was to prevent the Gikuyu from acquiring education which would make it difficult for the settlers to obtain cheap, illiterate and uneducated labour for their farms.

Whilst the Mau Mau were either in the forest, detention camps or prisons, the colonial government initiated land reforms that resulted in mass confiscation of family land of Mau Mau suspects in Gikuyuland. Loyalist Gikuyus were the beneficiaries of these land reforms by which the government hoped their greater wealth and power would act as a buffer against renewed subversion. The government had even assured loyalists that their Mau Mau enemies would never return to Gikuyuland. Historian Frank Furedi explains the grand strategy as follows:

During the Emergency, the colonial administration actively encouraged sections of the African petit bourgeoisie to transform themselves into a class of capitalists. Although the new capitalist class was still weak, relative to its pre-Emergency position, it had gained considerable power. Collaborators throughout Kenya, and specifically in Gikuyuland, were rewarded, increasing the social basis for moderate nationalism. Consequently by the end of the Emergency the balance had shifted away from those who supported the Mau Mau perspective towards those inclined to compromise. The colonial administration knew that the problems that drove Kikuyu squatters and their allies towards militant resistance remained unresolved. But it hoped that with the help of its revitalized African allies an outcome satisfactory for colonial interests could be realized. It could be argued that the very aim of political bargaining was to assist the ascendancy of moderate nationalism. The final settlement boosted the position of the African businessmen and middle class and effectively excluded the majority from participating in the benefits of independence.

Thus when independence came there were thousands of dispossessed Gikuyu without roots either in the Rift Valley, Nairobi and even

Gikuyuland itself. They had not only been deprived of opportunity to educate their children but their loyalist enemies were firmly in control of government. In his book **Mau Mau: An African Crucible**, Robert B. Edgerton quotes the lamentations of Solomon Memia, a Mau Mau veteran living in Nairobi slum:

I regret to state that those of us who fought for freedom were never given a chance to participate in the present government. The majority of ex-freedom fighters are among those who live here in the shanties, because they have nowhere else to go. We weren't given jobs because it was alleged we were uneducated. The young who were in school during the freedom struggle are the ones who have the say in our government, and they are not concerned with our affairs.

Mungiki members say that they are direct ancestors of this community of squatter, detainees and martyrs of the Mau Mau war that bore the brunt of Emergency measures in Kenya's fight for independence. It seems to me that if the term historical justice has any concrete meaning it is inconceivable how these historical grievances of Mungiki can be dismissed offhand.

Let us now turn to the complaints about extra-judicial executions. Since May, 2007 the police have been carrying out extra-judicial execution of Mungiki suspects with apparent acquiescence of Central Kenya political leaders, media and the general public. The conspicuous absence of sustained public outrage in the wake of these unprecedented executions in independent Kenya's history is an indication that the targeted assassinations are either popular or at least they provide a tentative answer to the complex problem known as the Mungiki menace. Occasionally, human rights groups have issued feeble protests against these executions but so far they have not taken any concrete measures to stop them. In the circumstances, it seems that various segments of the populace would not be bothered with these executions so long as the police are discreet enough to save us from the plague of bad conscience and embarrassment of simple herdsmen coming across bodies of young Kikuyus with gunshot wounds at the back of their heads.

Viewed this way, part of the public outrage against the events of the bloody Monday was not so much because of the violent protest, but also because Mungiki is foisting on us an issue that should be happening out

of sight. In staging those demonstrations Mungiki was first reminding us that despite losing about 5,000 members to extra-judicial executions and disappearances, they are still a force to reckon with. Secondly, these demonstrations have pushed to the fore the issue of whether it is legitimate for the State to wipe-out Mungiki members through extra-judicial executions. The media seem to be ambivalent about the feasibility of extra-judicial killings as a measure to eradicate the Mungiki “monster”.

In his memos published in the *Saturday Nation* of April 19, 2008, Kwamchetsi Makokha questions the logic of the apparent contest in barbarism between the Mungiki and the police. In his words:-

Between police and the outlawed Mungiki sect only one winner can emerge in the battle for supremacy. And the battle will be determined more by brains than firepower. This past week, the Mungiki has demonstrated its ability to outwit police, out-plan them and outclass them in the use of violence to create fear. Last year, numerous bodies turned up after what were believed to be extra-judicial executions in what the police sold to the public as the war on the Mungiki. Clearly, that war never ended. Looking at events of this week-where Mungiki members created fear and mayhem in several major towns – it is clear the police declaration of victory was premature in the extreme. Yet, the battle with the Mungiki need not be frontal, confrontational or even violent. I have argued previously that the police must demonstrate that they are better human beings than the Mungiki. If they are just as brutal as the Mungiki, and just as eager as to employ third degree tactics to eliminate the gang, they might as well join the sect instead of pretending to keep law and order.

The Standard editorialist in the issue of April 16, 2008 raised similar doubts about these covert and extra-legal police tactics as follows:-

To succeed in dealing with Mungiki, the government needs a better understanding of its different parts: the atavistic sect claiming roots in the Mau Mau movement, the organized crime network muscling for control of unregulated business sectors and the political machine reaching out to disenfranchised Kikuyu youth. Each poses a different threat and requires a different approach. Brute force alone, history has shown, only pushes Mungiki underground. Extra-judicial killings remain an unjustifiable approach in a democracy. And, anyway, killing every last member of the sect is neither practical nor socially desirable. The ideal approach is a lawful crackdown on the street-level criminal element, de-oathing those not yet involved in crimes, social reforms to deny the sect recruits and an

intelligence-based campaign against those who plan and run its extortion, protection and drug-running rackets. With new laws on organized crime in the pipeline, it will soon be easier to put Mungiki leaders behind bars for running a criminal organization.

The other grievance of Mungiki relates to the proscription of the Kenya National Youth Alliance (KNYA) as a political party. Is this grievance legitimate? In Kenya the right to political participation is actualized largely through the agency of political parties. This right is enshrined under sections 1A, 32, 78, 79 and 80 of the Constitution. The restrictions to these political rights and constitutional privileges are confined to prisoners, remandees and detainees.

A person's membership – real or perceived – in a proscribed society does not disentitle him from enjoyment of these rights. In short, there are no valid legal or constitutional grounds to stop Mungiki members from pursuing their political objectives through KNYA. Hitherto, the media have not ventured opinion on the issue of KNYA. For the moment, it suffices to say that if KNYA were allowed to operate freely, this would be the first political party of the underclass, by the underclass and for the underclass, albeit the Kikuyu underclass. If the underclass in other areas of Kenya were to organize their own political parties' politics in Kenya would never again be business as usual! This is one of the main beefs of the Kikuyu establishment against Mungiki.

The grievances of Mungiki concerning alleged conviction of their leader on fabricated charges cannot be reviewed in this commentary because the matter is *sub judice* given that he has filed an appeal in the High Court.

To be sure, the mere fact that one has grievances is not a license for any kind of reaction. Many people are rightly outraged by the *modus operandi* of Mungiki whatever the grievances of its members may be. Yet even this needs to be put in the correct perspective. As the events of bloody Monday unfolded a *Daily Nation's* reporter asked the spokesman of KNYA whether the strategy of violent demonstrations was not undermining its cause and cry for justice. Without hesitation Njuguna responded that time had come for that strategy whatever the cost of pursuing it may turn-out to be. In short Kenya is dangerously closer to revolutionary political options than its conservative political elite will ever admit.

Like many other Kenyans in the recent past, Mungiki members seem to equate the right to demonstration with violent demonstrations. In a democracy violent demonstrations have no place but this caveat must be contextualized because it is equally unusual for police in true democracies to apply thuggish methods in fighting enemies of the state. Further, the old truism applies here: An effective demonstration must never be mistaken for a procession of monks and nuns!

Those quick to condemn Mungiki's violent demonstrations should re-examine their positions during the vicious post-election violence that resulted in the death of 1300 people and displacement of 350,000 people according to government figures besides massive destruction of property that left parts of Rift Valley Province resembling the war fronts of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast. Two wrongs do not make right, no doubt, but our prerogative to think compels us to wonder how much violent Mungiki should be to deserve absolute condemnation in a country where it is seemingly normal for women to be raped and children burnt alive in churches over a disputed election.

Keen observers of Mungiki activities have wondered why its leaders have not taken advantage of the expanded political space to advance their causes. All too often, Mungiki's resort to violence is taken as evidence that it is simply not willing to play by the rules of civilized society. Is this really true? Not quite, when you consider the facts and evidence without jaundiced eyes.

Basically there are three ways in which citizens of a democracy engage the State. First, citizens engage the state as holders of rights and freedoms and beneficiaries of state protection. Secondly, the right of citizens to access the courts to agitate for or defend their rights and freedoms is the foundation of the rule of law because judges are the protectors of the rights of individual/groups and arbiter between them and the State. Thirdly, citizens engage the State as electors or by offering themselves for election to serve in the political arms of government. In concrete terms, unless one claims and proves that Mungiki members have declined to engage the State in accordance with the rules made to cater for the foregoing, it is not easy to understand the charge that they are bent on defying the rules of democratic civilization generally applicable in Kenya.

In theory, citizens of Kenya enjoy the rights and freedoms enshrined in Chapter five of the Constitution. Unfortunately, the Bill of Rights is a mere prospectus for majority of Kenyans and for Mungiki members it is an outright false prospectus. Section 70 and 74 of the Kenya Constitution guarantee the right to life and protection from inhuman treatment respectively whilst section 77 makes provisions to secure protection of law. Together with the right to personal liberty under Section 72 of the Constitution, it is impossible to imagine a set of rights more precious than those four. For Mungiki members, these four set of rights are at the core of the grievances about enhanced extra-judicial executions and disappearances over the last one year.

Consider now the right of access to courts. In a democracy, the power of the State to protect life and property and maintenance of public order is counterweighed by the duty of the State to do so either in accordance with the law or sanction of the courts to which affected citizens must have unrestricted access. With regard to Mungiki the record of the Kenya government is horrible. Normally when a person is arrested his friends and relatives expect to meet him later either at a police station or in court. This has not been the case for hundreds – Mungiki leaders claim thousands – of Mungiki members who have been arrested or rather picked up or kidnapped by undercover policemen only for their bodies to be “discovered” in bushes, forests and mortuaries in Nairobi and contiguous districts.

Whichever way we look at it, the absolute violation and subversions of the human rights of Mungiki members completely negate the notion that political space in Kenya has expanded so much that Mungiki has no excuses to resort to violence and other primitive methods to advance its hitherto mysterious cause and objectives. To the best of my knowledge, Mungiki members have not committed any crime, act or omission that is not punishable under our laws. Yet for a long time the Kenya government has pretended that membership of Mungiki and involvement in its economic and socio-political programmes are non-justiciable matters that only secret police units like *Kwekwe* and *Rhino squads* can handle. The question arises: What is the worth of democracy and a liberal constitution if the security of Kenyans from Mungiki and allied organizations ultimately rests on the efficacy of *Kwekwe* and *Rhino squads* in their dark arts?

Dead bodies of Mungiki and disappeared Mungiki suspects cannot tell tales or go to court and so it may help for those who think the courts are a viable option for Mungiki to bear this in mind. In cases where the police have charged Mungiki members in courts the record is a mixed bag of success and failure depending on one's perspective. What about the political option?

Since 1992, Mungiki has formed short-lived political alliances with practically every notable political party in Kenya ranging from Ford-Asili, DP, KANU, NARC to ODM. All these parties have used and dumped Mungiki without addressing the cause and aspirations of its members. Faced with this frustration, Mungiki members formed the National Youth Movement Alliance which was promptly demoted from a political party to a pressure group. Mungiki itself was banned a couple of years ago by Commissioner of Police. In plain terms, Mungiki cannot lawfully pursue the political grievances of its members. The denial of a political platform to pursue its goals makes it easy for the police to treat it as a vicious criminal gang and fair game for *Kwekwe* and *Rhino* squads. Viewed in this perspective, it is not easy to credibly say that Mungiki has refused or failed to take advantage of expanding political space in Kenya.

The tragic story of Mungiki presents an interesting paradox which can be cast as a question: How can Kenya be experiencing the worst human rights violations in its independence history when the country is undeniably freer and democratic? The paradox is illusory when critically viewed against the hard facts. Strange as it may sound, political space usually does not expand apace for all segments of society. In Kenya, political struggles against Nyayo dictatorship and repression have achieved greater freedoms and democratic climate for the landed aristocracy and middle classes to advance their socio-political aspirations. Kenya is yet to get its first authentic political party of the underclasses – peasants, workers, hawkers, lumpen proletariat and other wretched citizens who now include the IDPs. The political right of the underclasses to participate in politics is limited to their appropriate ethnic or regional political parties that by definition dedicate themselves to the objectives of the middle-classes. For Mungiki, this truism has a longer ancestry.

In the early years of Uhuru, the loyalists and Mau Mau fought fierce battles for control of KANU branches in Central Kenya. Whenever he

could, Kenyatta supported the loyalists who also enjoyed the backing of the church and government officials. No where was this contest fiercer than in Murang'a District which was a stronghold of Mau Mau during the Emergency and teeming with many victims of attendant land reforms. The contest pitted Bildad Kaggia and James Beauttah on the side of Mau Mau whilst the loyalist's visible representative was Dr. J. G. Kiano with the likes of John Michuki and Kenneth Matiba on the periphery. Robert Edgerton recounts the outcome of the contest thus:-

Most of the population supported the former Mau Mau leaders, and in August 1964 Kaggia was elected Chairman of the Murang'a KANU party while other Mau Mau leaders won important offices, and then used their offices to campaign for free land and other benefits for Mau Mau veterans. Soon after, Kenyatta openly attacked Kaggia and his policy, and, with government support Kiano's loyalists organized a coup to remove the Mau Mau group from office. Kaggia and the other Mau Mau were publicly accused of being Communists, and, with the help of the suddenly resurrected paramilitary KANU Youth Wing, Mau Mau leaders were captured and tortured until they confessed having taken an oath to kill loyalists. Some of the leaders were murdered. Mau Mau veterans would never again seriously challenge for political power. Pathetically, a number of former Mau Mau leaders tried to sue for their rights in Kenya's courts. They did not find relief.

It is by no accident that today Murang'a District is one of the strongholds of Mungiki because its cry for historical injustices resonates with many people. Like in 1964, torture and killing seem to be the weapons of choice for Central Province political leaders afraid of the re-emergence of a Mau Mau-type movement. As with their Mau Mau predecessors, the courts are not viable options for Mungiki as demonstrated in this review.

With all legal options seemingly closed for Mungiki members, they had to resort to violent mass action which has only ignited a fresh wave of assassinations and kidnappings by unknown persons eager to pass them off as gangster-type killings. Given the complexity of the Mungiki phenomenon, it is obvious that despite its methods Mungiki is no more a criminal or terrorist organization than the Mau Mau was according to British colonialists and revisionist historians. Of course Mungiki cannot be seeking the liberation of all Kenya as Mau Mau strived to but its limited goal does not negate all its political claims. Now that the post-election

murderers, arsonists and rapists have made a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission possible, is it prudent that we give Mungiki an opportunity to state its case?

The Right Honourable Raila Odinga used his first speech as Prime Minister to call for talks with Mungiki leaders partly because the controversial methods hitherto deployed to deal with Mungiki don't seem to be working. Former Minister for Defence Njenga Karume and some Central Province leaders soon joined the Prime Minister in the dialogue calls but the media are not fully convinced that is a proper recourse. Like Professor George Saitoti – who took over the security docket from Kangema MP John Michuki – the media would rather Mungiki is dealt with purely as a criminal gang of sub-human species of Kenyans. Luckily, after Raila spoke, the media are coming around in appreciating that all the roots of Mungiki are not criminal or traceable to hell. As illustration, *The Standard* of April 17, 2008, editorialized as follows:-

We agree with Internal Security minister, Prof. George Saitoti, that Government should not negotiate with Mungiki – or any other organized crime gang for that matter. But, we repeat, the State needs a broader repertoire of weapons against the gang than is available in the police force. Despite their talk of land grievances and unemployment, Mungiki are primarily a problem of a criminal nature. Extortion and protection rackets, enforced with the threat of beheadings, are not offences you can talk your way out of. However, addressing the root causes of the political and social disillusionment of young Kikuyu men will go along way to heading off future recruits for the gang. As long as Mungiki remains the only powerful avenue for employment, political and cultural expression, crackdowns will only increase our prison population.

It cannot be reasonably expected that economic fortunes of the Gikuyu underclass that provides recruits to Mungiki will significantly improve in the foreseeable future. Equally true, it is a matter of time before the underclasses in Kenya discover an umbilical chord that links their economic plight and Kenya's history and politics. In all probability, this realization will dawn first in Central Kenya which has some experience with revolutionary politics of the underclasses. In the end neither the politicians nor the media can successfully conceal the ideological nature of the forces that gave birth to Mungiki irrespective of some of the crude methods it has chosen or been pushed to adopt. This is a moment of truth for Kenya

and the media can either help to clarify the facts or conceal the truth. Their record thus far is not encouraging whether sheer ignorance or seeming incapacity of journalists to think beyond the first order is the proximate cause!

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Getting Heard: (Re)claiming Performance Space is the third in a series of publications on art, culture and society released by Twaweza Communications. The aim is to bring to the fore conversations taking place in Kenya about identity, creativity, nationalism and the generation of knowledge. The series is also about the pursuit of freedom through arts, media and culture.

In *Getting Heard* the performance space is shown to offer wider possibilities for knowledge creation. It shows that in post-colonial Africa political leaders have consistently performed over their subjects at local and national levels. There is discussion of: Kenya National Theatre, Story Telling, Radio Theatre, Translation, African Languages, Music, Media and Mungiki

This volume opens a window to our understanding of post-colonial Africa through performances.

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